

**EVER EXPANDING EDGES: TRINITY, CRISIS, AND CARE —
PASTORAL THEOLOGY AND SCIENTIFIC METHODOLOGY**

**A Dissertation
presented to
the Faculty of the
Claremont School of Theology**

**In Partial Fulfillment
of the Requirements for the Degree
Doctor of Philosophy**

**by
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ABSTRACT

Ever Expanding Edges: Trinity, Crisis, and Care —

Pastoral Theology and Scientific Methodology

by

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The predicament that gives rise to this dissertation is the inadequacy of current models of Christian pastoral theology for enabling the distinguishing of the presence of the divine in the spiritual directive work which clergy perform with individual parishioners. While there are numerous and diverse models of pastoral theology, with specific notions and interventions of caring available to the parish clergy, these models have no criteria for distinguishing between authentic elements of the divine-human encounter and inauthentic elements of that occasion, which is a definitive moment in the life of a Christian. Models of pastoral theology and care currently available have few parameters for assisting in the work of differentiating true elements of the divine from false.

Thus, one of the most pressing needs for pastoral theology is the creation of a model which will enable the distinguishing of data having a bearing upon the nature and human experience of God in distinction from those other psychic events which have a bearing only upon psychology or the psychology of religion. Since this is the age of scientific reasoning this model of pastoral theology and care will attempt a construction according to a soft scientific design.

The thesis of this dissertation is that a pastoral theology of caring which focuses upon spiritual discernment can be constructed from New Testament texts and other Christian discernment programs and practices for utilization by the parish minister working on

issues of spiritual development and guidance with the laity not using psychological data, but rather theological data.

Chapter 1 the dissertation begins with a review of several important, viable paradigms in pastoral theology. It will then critique these paradigms by highlighting potential strengths and weaknesses as well as looking for elements which can be featured in our proposed model. In the second chapter we will propose our own methodology and explicate its five essential theses. Chapter 3 provides our theological and anthropological assumptions and deals with the issue of religious pluralism. Chapter 4 explicates an understanding of the divine nature and the human possibility of the experience of that nature. Chapter 5 contributes a theory of the human self in light of our proposed theological conjectures. Chapter 6 supplies a New Testament hermeneutic which sheds light on our interpretation of religious language and religious experience and serves as our theological data base. Chapter 7 explicates the nature of peak human religious experience and Chapter 8 explores their opposite, negating, human religious experience. Both chapters suggest the manner in which self is created and transformed through these experiences. Chapter 9 suggests supplemental criteria for diagnosing and assessment which clergy might utilize with local churches and parishioners. Chapter 10 illustrates the way in which the proposed model might be used with lay persons by showing three cases studies.

Table of Contents

	Page
Prologue.....	1
Chapter	
1. A Proposal for a Pastoral Theology	11
Theology	11
Theology as Pastoral Theology	15
Prevailing Models of Pastoral Theology	20
Orthodox Pastoral Theology.....	21
Liberal Pastoral Theology	22
Neo-Orthodox Pastoral Theology	26
Liberation Pastoral Theology	28
Pastoral Theology as Contextual Moral Theology	29
Pastoral Theology as Spiritual Formation.....	32
A Pastoral Theology of the Ever Expanding Edge	35
2. A Model for a Scientific Pastoral Theology	37
Basic Design.....	37
The Prospect of an Experiential Model of Pastoral Theology	39
Proposition One: The Fundamental Grounds for this Pastoral Theology are New Testament Scriptures and Human Edge Experiences	41
Proposition Two: The Predominate Procedure of Examination of the New Testament Source is a Multidimensional Interpretation of Selected Subject Matter	44

Proposition Three: The Examination of the Edge Experience Source can be Understood as an Inquiry into the Sacred Nature of the Divine-Human Encounter	53
Proposition Four: This Pastoral Theology will translate the Connection and Interplay of these Twin Foundations which does Justice to Our Definition of Religious Experience	60
Proposition Five: This Pastoral Theology will also feature an Empirical Method informed by the Scientific Model for Theology of Nancey Murphy	62
3. The Concept, Truth, and Knowledge of God	66
Theology and the Idea of God	66
Christian Theology as Pastoral Theology	70
The Experience of God as the Subject of Pastoral Theology	74
The Knowability of God: Self-Disclosure and Self-Demonstration of the Divine.....	76
The Community of the Divine Self-Disclosure	83
Diversity Within the Christian Experience of God's Self-Demonstrations.....	88
The Justification for a Christian Discernment Formula	95
4. The Trinitarian God	97
The Essence and Urge of the Divine Persons	97
The Trinity as the Personal Character of God: Jesus and the Father	100
The Character of the Personhood of the Triune God.....	107
The Person of Jesus and the Destiny of Persons	111
The Person of the Holy Spirit: An All-Embracing Field of Force.....	118

Basic Nature and Capabilities of the Trinitarian God	120
The Divine Field of Force as Holy Spirit	122
The Holy Love of God and the Trinity	125
5. A Theological Understanding of the Human Self: Appropriation of Divine Likeness	130
A Christian Self-Understanding	130
The Dignity and Destiny of Persons: Divine Congruity	134
Self-Postures and Authentic Selfhood	138
Pneumatology and the Self: The Field of the Spirit and the Creation of Persons and Community	150
6. Transformative Religious Experience	155
Nuances and Dynamics	155
Discernment Practices in the Earliest Christian Communities	167
The New Testament Texts: The Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit	168
Discerning the Qualities of God in the Early Church	169
7. The Affirming Edge Experience.....	185
A Heuristic of the Edge	185
The Edge Dimension of Human Experience	187
The Affirming Edge in the New Testament	190
Ecstasy and Mysticism	195
Aesthetics and Theology of Beauty.....	200
The Spirit, the Contours, and Lure of Love	204

Fecund Outgrowth of the Spirit	212
Faith and Hope	215
8. The Opposing Edge Experience	220
Novel Horizons Through Negation	220
Sin as the Trial and Anguish of Non-identity	226
Overthrow and Passing of Former Self	237
Non-Self and Negative Identity in Dehumanization and Oppression	240
Self-Fracture: Grief, Loss, and Death	248
Illness and the Breaking of the Body	250
9. A Proposal for Diagnostic Discernment Criteria	254
Establishment of Adequate Criteria for Assessment in this Pastoral Theology	254
Pastoral Assessment as an Exposition of Religious Affections	259
Jon Sobrino: Discerning God by Way of the Poor of the Earth	260
Jonathan Edwards: Discerning God's Beauty in Human Beauty	263
John Wesley: The Grace of Perfection and Warm Love... ..	275
10. Suggestions for Pastoral Practice.....	280
The Pastor as Theological Edge Interpreter	280
Case Study 1. Martha: Self-Transcending Lover of the Poor	283
The Negative Edge	287
Case Study 2. Naomi: Alone and Self-Transcending on Her Own	288
Case Study 3. Christianne: Self-Transcending Feminist	289

Self-Transcending Sermons, Theological Studies, Meetings, and Bake Sales	291
Bibliography	293

PROLOGUE

The Statement of the Thesis and Its Significance: A Scientific Pastoral Theology

The dilemma that gives rise to this dissertation is the inadequacy of current models of Christian pastoral theology for enabling the distinguishing of the presence of the divine in the spiritual directive work that clergy perform with individual parishioners. While there are numerous and diverse models of pastoral theology, with specific notions and interventions of caring available to the parish clergy, these models have few criteria for distinguishing between authentic elements of the divine-human encounter and inauthentic elements of that occasion, which is a definitive moment in the life of a Christian. Models of pastoral theology and care currently available have limited parameters for aiding in the work of differentiating true elements of the divine from false. As the physicist possesses models that enable the clear differentiation of nuclear and atomic events, which are essential to the understanding of the nature of particles and how they comprise energy and matter, and the psychiatrist has a model for understanding the difference between pathological and healthy expressions of emotional and psychic life, the theologian and the pastor must have a means of not only defining religious experience, but of differentiating those elements in human religious experience which give accurate knowledge of God.

While psychological models are often employed for pastoral work, the use of psychology for pastoral caring is limited, since it does not address the issues of the existence or nature of God. Hence, one of the most pressing needs for pastoral theology is the creation of a model which will enable the distinguishing of data which has a bearing upon the nature and human experience of God over against those other psychic events which have a bearing only upon psychology or the psychology of religion. Since this is the

age of scientific reasoning, this model of pastoral theology and care will be constructed according to a loosely structured, soft scientific design.

Creating a Scientific Pastoral Theology

The thesis of this dissertation is that a pastoral theology of caring which focuses upon spiritual discernment can be constructed from New Testament texts and other Christian discernment programs and practices for utilization by the parish minister working on issues of spiritual development and formation with the laity. This will be organized according to the standard features of a scientific research program of the human sciences, that is, the soft sciences, using not psychological data gathered from the personality sciences, but rather theological data. The dissertation will develop a scientific theological model for discerning authentic movements of the divine.

Novelty and Contribution of the Dissertation

Theology is not advancing as quickly as other disciplines in the modern world, not because of its subject matter, which is God, but because theological research programs have failed to embrace modern assumptions and premises about methodology and epistemology which are characteristic of the current age of probable scientific reasoning. The shift from the age of authority to the age of probable reasoning has thrown old ways of doing theology into a crisis. Pastoral theology, partially in an effort to embrace the modern spirit, has often utilized psychological theory and practice, which in some cases has a scientific basis, to affirm the methods of scientific empirical investigation.¹ Yet, the

¹ See Howard J. Clinebell, *Basic Types of Pastoral Care and Counseling*, rev. ed. (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1984).

psychological sciences cannot enable a serious discussion of the essence or existence of God, because this is not their focus. This means these models are of limited use by the parish minister for spiritual direction and discernment of the activity of God in the human personality. This model of pastoral theology will, therefore, utilize primarily theological data. It will explore this data according to the standards of scientific reasoning. Some type of objective criteria is needed to enable ministers to recognize authentic encounters with God, the kinds of behavioral characteristics which can serve to confirm and critique church teaching about the nature and destiny of persons, and the impact of God upon the human personality. There is no current model that offers a scientific explanation of the experiential life associated with fellowship with God. This pastoral theology hopes to meet the challenges of the new epistemology head on, by offering a theological design developed along scientific lines.

Description of the Methodology of Scientific Pastoral Theology

This pastoral theology will describe and delineate criteria for judging religious experience which can aid clergy and laity in the process of spiritual discernment and formation. This theology will be guided by the methodology of scientific research developed by Imre Lakatos, as outlined by Nancey Murphy in her exploration of scientific theological method, in her work *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*.² The following are the salient features of a scientific theology of pastoral care.

The hard core is the origin and focus of this theological research program and sums up how the project understands the faith of the community. The hard core serves

² Nancey Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990).

as the primary organizing idea concerning what we believe Christianity is all about. The hard core sums up, in a distinct condensation and intuitive perception, the faith of the community and drives the entire project. Our hard core starts with a doctrine of the trinitarian reality of God and the human ability to experience, discern, and be transformed by this encounter with the divine. The hard core explicates the nature and dynamics of God and the manner in which God is known.

The negative heuristic are simply accretions in the program which are made through auxiliary hypotheses which are designed to prevent the falsification of the hard core. Our hard core argues that God is a trinitarian reality which can be known and experienced as holy love, and that this creates a human self which is uniquely characteristic of one related to this God. It also posits that the human in relation to God will manifest divine attributes. The negative heuristic means we cannot abandon the hard core and must argue convincingly that God is a trinitarian reality and that God can affect humans in the manner which we argue.

Another feature, the positive heuristic, is essentially the blueprint suggested by the tradition, in this case the tradition of the Christian understanding of the hard core, and the outline suggested by the tradition as to which theological and doctrinal focal points are appropriate to the exploration at hand. The positive heuristic enables us to pick up the ongoing argument at the proper historical place and makes certain that we cover all the appropriate subjects in the pursuit of our research. In other words, we need to be faithful to the tradition of the knowledge of God, God's influence upon human personality, and allow the project to be guided by the dogmatic formulations of the church concerning our

subject matter. We are going to work from a trinitarian concept of God, allowing the tradition to serve as a heuristic guideline concerning our own trinitarian assertions. We are thus bounded and guided by trinitarian doctrine concerning the way in which God can be discussed.

Auxiliary hypotheses are theories within the program which help explicate the nature of the hard core. These are consequences of the hard core and spell out the meaning of the hard core. Further, in a detailed manner, they explicate the broad ideas of the hard core. We need to begin with our most general argument about God's nature and essence, and then, through auxiliaries, make the case as to how God can relate to, encounter, and dramatically transform the human self into the divine likeness, and how that likeness can be apprehended and used as criteria for pastoral care. These auxiliaries mean that we have to work cautiously in making our way from God's trinitarian nature and essence to the manner in which the divine reality impinges upon the human self. The outline of the chapters will serve as the flow of the argument from the hard core on down to the basic data through the auxiliaries. Essential to our project are several auxiliary hypotheses. One will have to be concerned with the tradition of discernment of the work or fruits of the of the Holy Spirit, as found in the New Testament letters of Paul. Another one rationalizes an approach to the scriptures as data which enables accurate insight and perception of the divine in human life. Another auxiliary will stem from the works of three more recent classic writers concerning their criteria for judging the signs of the actions of the Holy Spirit. These include John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards and Jon Sobrino. These will help establish criteria for making pastoral assessments for clergy in the work of spiritual evaluation and guidance.

Another feature which characterizes this critical method is the reliance upon scripture as data to inform us about the nature of God. All programs need a data base. For this scientific pastoral theology, we will use scripture as our primary data base, and we will be supplementing this with the other discernment schemes mentioned above. This means we will have to make a case for why the sources of data ought to be considered reliable primary sources of information about God. Further, we will have to understand the scripture as a reasonable, reliable, and valid source of information about God if we are to succeed. We will need to argue that the information about the way God was present to the earliest Christian community and the communities of Wesley, Edwards, and Sobrino are consistent with the way God is present in human experience today.

Finally, Murphy argues that our project will need to correlate the data base and our theological theory. Essentially, the task of this project will be to show that the theological doctrines of the church concerning the operation and accomplishment of the Holy Spirit upon the human personality, are indicated by the data through the auxiliary hypotheses and how together the entire program can be used as a reliable and valid measure for pastoral assessment and evaluation, which retains prevalently theological content and composition. In short, we are utilizing a deductive methodology because in science the logical relation between hypotheses and data is deductive. Therefore, we will be attempting to accept secular standards of probable reasoning and rationality as exemplified in scientific methodology and attempt to justify Christian belief on those foundations.

The project will be limited both by content and methodology. It will be the building of a claim about the knowledge of God according to a scientific methodology developed

into a working model for a scientific theology by Nancey Murphy. It will work from the enclosed chapter outline beginning with the hard core (the early chapters) through the auxiliary hypotheses (the middle chapters) and deal with the fundamental theological data drawn from scripture and the tradition (the sections on scripture and discernment criteria) which give knowledge of the activity of God and how this activity of God can be recognized by the minister and used as objective data in the task of spiritual direction with individual lay persons. It will be informed by the theology of life-crisis developed by David Tracy, who perceives God's actions upon people most clearly during what he calls "limit," "boundary," or "edge" occasions.³ These are experiences of positive and negative crisis, which have the effect of enabling persons to appropriate more of the divine being, and achieve a more authentic humanity, one more characteristic of God's trinitarian life.

Flow of the Argument: Chapter Descriptions

The dissertation will essentially begin with a review, exposition and critique of not only the task of theology and pastoral theology in general, but a review of several important paradigms in pastoral theology, which are presently on the scene and practically viable. We will look at specific schools of thought, noting their strengths and weaknesses, and look for hints from them that might point us in an appropriate direction while instructing our own model. In the second chapter, we will propose our own unique methodology and argue its five essential theses for our pastoral theology of religious experience. Then we must establish in the next several chapters our theological and anthropological

³David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975).

assumptions for the methodological propositions, establishing our argument of how it is possible to experience God and understand humanity in the fashion we are proposing. Having accomplished this we will explore in detail our two primary sources for our theology, the appropriate texts and themes of the New Testament and those universal human “edge” experiences, contending how we feel these two are correctly understood and correlated. In the ninth chapter, we will look at data from adjunct sources and offer a way in which they might aid the pastor in evaluation and finish with suggestive practical implementations.

Chapter 1

This section provides a broad overlook at pastoral theology. It categorizes several models of pastoral theology currently available according to crucial fundamental criteria and reference points. These will indicate suitable direction for the project. Finally, we will briefly introduce our revised model and its connection and dependence on earlier models.

Chapter 2

The fundamental thesis of our proposed revised model of theology is detailed through explication of the hard core and introduction of auxiliary hypotheses.

Chapter 3

Chapter 3 provides the theological basis for our entire project by presenting the way in which God is understood and experienced according to this model. It deals with the basic questions about religion, epistemology, and theological pluralism and diversity.

Chapter 4

In Chapter 4 our outline is made concerning the hard core of our thesis about the reality of God, and upon what basis we can speak about the human experience of God as well as the fundamental nature of the living God of the Christian tradition.

Chapter 5

Chapter 5 provides a reflection on the nature and identity of the human being in light of what we noted about God. It contributes a theory of the self which is consistent with our argument about God and coheres with the direction of the rest of the dissertation. It is an argument concerning theological anthropology through auxiliary hypotheses.

Chapter 6

The discussion in Chapter 6 supplies us with an appropriate New Testament hermeneutic based upon a reasonable interpretation which enables us to accurately utilize our Christian texts in an admissible fashion for the task of properly interpreting personal religious experience. The task here will be to show that the texts can supply us with a Christian religious language that discloses an authentic way of understanding the human self. The texts will serve as our theological data base.

Chapter 7

Chapter 7 explores the interpretation of peak human experiences. We affirm these as a primary source and field for religious experience, pastoral care, and intervention and creative transformation. This chapter will continue to explicate our data base.

Chapter 8

This chapter will look into difficult edge experiences and how the limits placed upon

us by these particular situations might be understood as properly religious, creatively transformative, and humanizing. Chapters 7 and 8 will further illustrate how our thesis can stand the test of soft scientific scrutiny. It will address issues of reliability, validity, and verification through attempting to be guided by standards of reasonable probability.

Chapter 9

Chapter 9 explicates additional criteria for diagnosing and interpreting what we label as authentic religious experience and suggestions for pastoral care as spiritual direction. We make practical suggestions concerning the manner in which the clergy might use this assessment tool with a congregation. In this section we will correlate theory and data, while arguing that certain Christian epistemic practices provide us with supplemental informative theological data.

Chapter 10

This concluding chapter will present concrete grounding for the model in three case studies indicating the manner in which this model might work in practice with individuals in a local church setting.

CHAPTER I

A Proposal for a Pastoral Theology

Theology

Wolfhart Pannenberg begins the first installment of his *Systematic Theology*, by noting that theology is, today, a pluralistic enterprise with multiple meanings, and at heart signifies an “academic discipline or at least a human concern for knowledge.”¹ This dissertation searches for a model of doing theology by making a contribution to the quest for a satisfactory concept of approaching knowledge connected to Christian pastoral theology and caring, particularly Christian teaching concerning religious experience.

This project hopes to present an accessible theology which is of use for pastoral theology and pastoral caring in the local church, and relates to the nature of religion and religious experience. It hopes and attempts to be accessible, intelligible, and universal. The discipline of theology has as its primary concern the knowledge of the living God. Theology exists for the sake of God, and theologians seek to explicate a fundamental problem or object: God. The theology which concerns us is not simply the variety that believes theology to be a cultural discipline. Theology, as understood here, is an effort to grasp the complexity of a rather simple truth, namely, that God exists, is present as a loving force field, and is available to everyone and discernible by everyone. The trinitarian God present to us in Jesus Christ and the Spirit is the essence of our concept of theology as the discipline of the knowledge of the reality of God. As the liberation theologians seek and find God at the margins of society as well as in the Other, the Stranger, or the

¹ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, trans. Geoffrey W. Bromiley (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 1:1.

peripheral person, this model of pastoral theology is also one that seeks and finds God peripherally. But in addition to the social, political, and economic margins, as in recent types of emancipatory theologies, this theology of religious experience locates God and is conceived at the frontier or edges of individual human existence and experience.

Every theology begins from two fundamental locations. The first location is found somewhere within the comprehensive Christian tradition. For our task here the focal point lies in the most important texts directing the work of the pastor, the New Testament, particularly the gospels and Paul's letters. The second location, according to the particular methodology utilized here, must be some configuration of common human experience.

Theologies differ for several reasons. Frequently these variances depend upon either the singled out Christian texts (Tillich's answer), the preferred shared human experiences selected as fundamental (Tillich's question), or the particular hermeneutic applied to understanding these primary sources.²

In the case of the liberation theologies, traditional themes of dogma are paired with certain cultural, ethnic, economic, political experiences, or various combinations of these resulting in such creative and notable expressions of Christian teaching as feminist theology.³

Each of these novel liberative theologies, whether pastoral or fundamental such as

² Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1951), 1: 41-46.

³ Mary Daly, *Beyond God the Father: Toward a Philosophy of Women's Liberation* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973); Rosemary R. Ruether, *Sexism and God-Talk: Toward a Feminist Theology* (Boston: Beacon Press, 1983); Phyllis Trible, *God and the Rhetoric of Sexuality* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978).

political theology,⁴ or liberation theology⁵ emerges from a world of perspectival voice of Christian religion, myth, and symbol. Each also inhabits a particular secular world as well which shapes perceptions and effects the way each author understands the task of theology.

The liberationists, for example, construct an emancipatory theology from a certain interpretation of Christian texts and a specific situation of oppression. The two locations of the pastoral theology of religious experience we offer here are the world of certain Christian texts and the evolving individual human personality at its developing frontier or edge. Our assumption here is that this frontier of the individual personality is filled out, and matures as it encounters the living God in edge moments of pleasure and distress. Thus, we are limited in our inquiry by the level at which we are investigating one primary theological source of human experience.

Having chosen a particular level of human experience to analyze is only the first requisite task for the constructing of a theology. Theology also ought to take into account the prevailing pluralistic and perspectival context. While multiple meanings in theology today are often a source of conflict and confusion, they are also a source of enhancement, which allow more refined solutions to the questions and challenges which the crises of life present to us. Theology ought to be, thus, an undertaking which is public and universal. Theology ought to take a course which constantly provides novel models to address the changing world. Before we present our own model we will first look at some classic, well-established models of pastoral

⁴ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology of Hope: On the Grounds and Implications of a Christian Eschatology*, trans. John Leitch (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1967).

⁵ Gustavo Gutierrez, *A Theology of Liberation: History, Politics, and Salvation*, trans. Caridad Inda and John Eagleson (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis Books, 1973).

theology. Then we will seek to build upon those models by offering our own unique perspectives to these multiple interpretations and models.

Another important struggle in the theological task is to demonstrate how Christian texts can be used to throw light upon the particular area of human experience selected for reflection. For a pastoral theology of religious experience, this means reinterpreting Christianity in a way which offers an eventful and expressive vision for today, which neither abandons the tradition of Christianity, which posits that God was in Christ reconciling the world, nor shrinks from those basic assumptions through which the modern individual perceives the nature of things. Our search is for a theology that resolves what David Tracy calls a “dual dilemma” that is, not being able to abandon either faith in the modern experiment, or faith in the God revealed in Jesus Christ. Further, neither traditional Christian self-understanding nor the abandonment of faith for modern secularist self-understanding is appropriate for this theological enterprise.⁶

A pastoral theology for today is not simply one for the Christian community, guided by some idea of allegiance to the community as though the search was exclusively for the Christian version of things. Pannenberg prompts us that theology is the search for the truth and the attempt to see how true or how much truth is contained in the Christian tradition. He maintains that in the past “Christian dogmatics has formally made the truth of Christian doctrine a presupposition rather than declaring it to be a theme of inquiry.”⁷ We are not starting with the truth. However,

⁶ David Tracy, *Blessed Rage for Order: The New Pluralism in Theology* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1975), 4.

⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Introduction to Systematic Theology* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1991), 7.

hopefully in the process of this work, we might confirm our research and conclusions as reasonably true.

The theological task is always the same: to critically reformulate the content of the biblical witness differentiating between what is historically relative and what is its enduring substance.

Pannenberg writes:

In each historical situation a new effort is needed to distinguish the truth of the gospel and of the dogma of the church from the evanescent forms of language and thought that at one time served to express such abiding truth. To make that distinction is possible only in terms of one's own thought and language, rooted in a contemporary setting.⁸

In each age and for each generation, theology must be reevaluated, revised, and reformulated. It is this reconstruction and renewal that characterizes the discipline of theology.

Theology as Pastoral Theology

One of the classic ways of understanding pastoral theology is demonstrated by Thomas Oden, who notes that it is appropriately theology for the reason we noted earlier, namely, that as theology its subject matter is at heart the historical self-disclosure of God. It is called pastoral theology because it is that theological venture which inquires after the systematic theological delineation of the authority, responsibilities, and tasks of the pastoral ministry.⁹ As a type of theology, pastoral theology has the same two sources as any other type of theology, the biblical Christian texts and some type of familiar human experience, that experience being the situation of the minister engaged in the ordained ministry of caring through word, sacrament, and order. But the most difficult task of that arena of theology known as pastoral theology is

⁸ Ibid., 7.

⁹ Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1983), xi.

attempting to integrate the disparate theological provinces into a cohesive and usable theoretical framework that informs the parish minister in the appointment and performance of the profession of ministry. The clergy's challenge is the effort to make practical use of the various theological disciplines, and provide answers to the real dilemmas of experience and meaning with which parishioners find themselves engaged. Pastoral theology has this important, particular synthesizing responsibility. Pastoral theology is the theorizing about what pastors do. Pastoral theology invokes the whole notion of the calling and logic of Christian self-involvement and conviction, and the general self-understanding and requirements of the church.

This pastoral theology is also a theology of praxis. It involves a hermeneutical circle of theological method, where pastoral experience provides the environment for the elaboration and processing of theology. The location of the minister calls for a circumstantial theology suitable to that site in the life of the person whose situation calls for theological interpretation. Pastoral theology, therefore, is the theological obligation of the pastor. Pastoral theology is theology accomplished and performed pastorally, by the pastor in a place of an encouraging and vitalizing concern and care.

Pastoral theology has various meanings and elucidates all the subjects which the ordained parish clergy find they are engaged in, as noted above. There is a further key characteristic constituent which the tradition calls the care of souls. This is a consequential element in this proposed pastoral theology. Caring for people in an ecclesiological and theological context means assisting persons to evolve and expand personality and character. In all the church duties of the pastor, as the pastor lives and works with parishioners, the pastor's thoroughgoing goal is to spur a caring, growth-inducing relationship with each parishioner, which hopefully

advances and nourishes mature Christian personhood. This connection between pastor and parishioner is unique and perhaps unequaled among the associations and arrangements which develop between those we label helpers and healers, and the persons who come to them for some variety of empowering attention. The pastor lives with those she seeks to enable.

Some of the current models of pastoral care posit that care signifies one-on-one pastor-to-person dialogue which focuses on emotional, relational, developmental, moral, or spiritual issues in which the pastor engages the parishioner in a dialogue which sanctions the bringing of biblical and theological interpretations and meanings as a horizon for caring. Our theology definitely embraces this notion of care. However, pastoral caring is not limited to one hour a week or month. The pastor lives in community with the individual parishioners under concern and therefore, sees the ones being cared for in various contexts, and has recourse to support theological claims and interpretations of crucial edge experiences throughout the entire course of the parishioner's life within the church. Pastoral caring occurs not only at edge moments, which is our primary focus, but throughout the span of the lay individual's partnership and communion in the existence of the local church.

Pastoral theology is, therefore, to a great extent, the caring, enriching relationship in which the minister becomes immersed with members of the congregation under her or his concern. Pastoral care is the theological discipline of the caring being accomplished in all the offices and tasks of the minister, which unquestionably has proven to be a sound manner of providing and teaching care, and generating caring communities of people of character and moral integrity. Perhaps the most powerful and effective theological caring is congregational caring. This is done through the establishment of caring groups of persons who reflect upon the reality of Christian rhetoric and truth that the God of Jesus Christ is a God of thoroughly vast, holy love and all-

embracing potency, who raised Jesus from the dead. They seek to repair the world through the divine field of force called the Spirit, which has been disclosed and made accessible to the church and through the church to the entire world. Pastoral care is the continuous theme of the pastor with the people. This caring is generated and reinforced by the pastor in the course of administration, preaching, worship, social, and educational ministries. The clergy is called to exercise influence on parishioners in a manner which is contextually pastoral and thus, engaged not simply with the person as someone who simply serves a role in the church, but rather is attentive to the person as a person, with an eye out for being instrumental in the ripening of the individual's unique Christian personhood and self.

This model of pastoral care is based upon the minister's presence at certain defining moments, which we are calling edge experiences. This model of pastoral care concerns itself with those crisis moments of human experience, which contain an extraordinary, numinous character and disclose deeper structures and meanings which are normally understood as exceptional and deeply significant. These edge moments invite all individuals into another dimension of human experience, one that has the quality we feel is aptly called religious, due to the ecstatic, eccentric, and self-transcending temper of these occurrences. These edge moments are often self-explaining. The substance of them customarily reorients a person without the aid or benefit of an interpreter. This model of pastoral care, however, posits that the minister's primary task, in terms of promoting the actualizing of the personhood of each individual Christian under her care, is to possess the hermeneutical means of access which provide the parishioner with the environment for interpreting and incarnating the meaning of these edge experiences. This model focuses upon personal encounter and dialogue about the meanings

contained within and uncovering some direction suggested by poignant personal occasions.

While many theories of pastoral theology seek to correlate pastoral caring for souls with secular theories and practices of psychology, often the clergy discover an inability for the deep utilization of either of these often or well. A problem for parish clergy is the incapacity to utilize secular psychological theory and clinical counseling skills in much more than the most diluted fashion, as in perhaps broadly recognizing and diagnosing clinical syndromes which are relatively prevalent in the general population, such as anxiety disorders and depression. But the context and themes of pastoral caring are often unrelated to clinical psychology, so in parish life supplementary models are indispensable. The ecclesiastical context of pastoral caring compels the use of a model in which the subject matter of caring is unique. This context for our pastoral theology will be limited by a number of variables which spring from the local church context.

Our model will attempt to limit itself to the subject matter of discernment patterns of classic spirituality theology found in the Christian tradition. If insights from psychology are used they will be put to use in a mode that assists ministers to explicate the examination and confirmation of these classic themes of Christian faith. Pannenberg posits that theology has a responsibility to investigate and authenticate claims about the truth concerning the nature of the living God. Pannenberg suggests:

If theology does not properly face its particular task regarding the truth claims of the Christian tradition, then it easily happens that the clergy of the church are the first to become insecure and evasive about the message they are supposed to preach. When they become doubtful about the truth of the gospel, they will tend to replace it by other "causes" and the believers will be disturbed, because they no longer get to hear in church what they rightfully expect to be taught there.¹⁰

¹⁰ Pannenberg, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 6.

The project at hand is an attempt to limit ourselves to traditional theological content and themes for the ministry of and caring for souls. Here lies the limits of our theological venture, how to balance the sources of modernity and those biblical and original sources of the tradition with honesty to these origins and discover and implement a hermeneutical structure and pattern which enables this design and can be practically used today. But before we can propose a model we will briefly look at earlier models of pastoral theology to gain insight into how our model might be more instructive in elucidating this proposed type of caring.

Prevailing Models of Pastoral Theology

The purpose of this dissertation is the creation of a novel model of pastoral theology. Each model that has preceded this model has come out of a unique location and tried to establish the importance of central features which were essential to pastoral theology. Models are limited by what they propose to explain. Models of pastoral theology are limited as well as guided by the particular needs that they serve in the life of religious persons. The themes of pastoral theology ought to enable a thoughtful and gracious caring by ministers engaged in the life of the local church. Pastoral models need to integrate theological themes such as the nature and revelation of God, the meaning of religion and religious experience, and an understanding of the dynamics of the human self in terms of basic metaphors and construction of self, and woven in a manner which informs and enables the kind of caring in which ministers become involved. Variations found within the models of pastoral theology are a result of the complicated interpretations and interfacing of these numerous elements which are given by various models of theology. Several of these various designs will now be briefly analyzed according to the descriptions they provide about these basic motifs. Following this, we will pursue approaches which these themes prompt about the present pluralistic setting in pastoral theology and what possible hints each design for

care and counseling might suggest for the particular theological plan we are constructing.

Orthodox Pastoral Theology

The most appropriate characterization of the orthodox theological model of pastoral theology is that it is a theology constructed within a relatively enclosed theological circle. This strand of theology is often referred to as dogmatic theology because its focus is upon the explication of traditional church doctrine and practice in a fashion which is not really open to the influences of the world outside of the church. Most orthodox theology was constructed prior to the Enlightenment, and therefore, could not take the assumptions of modernity into consideration during its construction. However, any theology that was formed even after the Enlightenment which continued unaffected by the developing university disciplines such as the humanitarian fields of linguistics, history, world religions, and philosophy, and scientific fields of biology, psychology, and anthropology and the resulting new world views coming into being during and following the Enlightenment can be characterized as orthodox.¹¹ Orthodox theology is church theology and herein lies its excellence. It articulates dogma in a refined way and creates novel models of pastoral theology which exhibit a refined knowledge of the meanings within the theology that preceded it as it works and reworks the main traditions of the church. The world into which the orthodox invites one is highly cultured in terms of explicating theology and its ecclesiastical and sacramental context. Pastoral caring would be based upon an extensive systematic doctrine of the church and an exposition of its holy mysteries. Whether Protestant or Roman Catholic, orthodox pastoral theology and caring is, above all, integrating the laity into

¹¹ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 24.

the sacramental, liturgical, and doctrinal life of the church.¹² The idea of religious experience as ecclesiastical experience was characterized by strong emphasis on morality, both in the negative sense of self-denial, controlling those impulses the church defined as sinful inclinations, and in the more positive sense of developing the theological virtues in response to God's grace, Christ's work, and the gifts of the Spirit. While there was plenty of variation in how these basic motifs were explicated, this summary is accurate in its general assessment. Religious experience was also characterized by pietism and asceticism. Mysticism was not encouraged and was therefore, rather rare and a domain of the religious orders. God was viewed as supernatural but available through the church and the sacraments. The self was understood as progressing toward fulfillment by its understanding and being sincerely convicted of the church's dogma. Any model of theology, religious experience, or pastoral care that is characterized by these emphases could be understood as orthodox. The orthodox model, then, is epitomized by the refined development of the inner logic of its own convictions. But here lies correctly what is called its principal deficiency. It is a theology whose circle is closed to the ideas and influence of challenges and demands of the prevalent spirit and worldview of the times.

Liberal Pastoral Theology

The liberal model of pastoral theology can best be understood as the reformulation of the theological enterprise by those theologians who found the summons and terms of the modern world description too compelling to ignore. They opened theology to the influence of the information which the new exacting developments within the fields of science and humanities provided. Where orthodox theology had no modernity to challenge its assumptions or

¹² John. T. McNeill, *A History of the Cure of Souls: From Salvation to Fulfillment* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1978), 10.

disregarded those assumptions because they were either too threatening or judged as too immaterial to the theological project, liberal theologians scrambled to consolidate many of the most recent discoveries in science and the humanities with traditional Christian dogma and practice in a manner that cohered with the new conclusions and the novel way in which people were beginning to understand themselves and their world.¹³ The progressive liberal theologians understood that, for many reflective persons, the recent knowledge coming from almost every academic discipline, meant that it would be impossible to give credence to many of the traditional formulations of the orthodox heritage. Liberals believed it workable to be faithful both to the modernistic pursuit of knowledge, with its attending assumptions about methodology and procedures and the commitment to disputable deliberation that distinguishes it, as well as being devoted to their understanding concerning the essence of the Christian tradition.

In liberal pastoral theology, which advanced in response to the changes being made in systematic theology, pastoral theologians embraced those recent intellectual developments which they believed applicable to reformulating their discipline, namely, the psychological and personality sciences and the clinical practices that were derived from them. The individuals who stand out in the field of this new liberal pastoral theology were Anton Boisen, Seward Hiltner, and Howard Clinebell. They began to redirect the kind of caring that ministers did, from the original orthodox paradigm, in the direction of a comprehension that the pastor ought to care by embracing the insights of the personality sciences. These insights meant that the subject matter and style of pastoral caring broadened. It would be informed by church tradition of the cure of souls, but supplemented by knowledge uncovered by modern theorists and researchers on

¹³ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 26.

individual psychology and psychiatry and their notions of health, healing, pathology, and human development.

The significance of Boisen for pastoral theology and for our model was that he began the construction of an embodiment of pastoral theology and care which put to use the significant experiences of crisis and emergency in the personal lives of those he encountered in his work. Boisen argued that the most important encounters with the divine were moments where an individual, whom he called a “living human document,” came face to face with difficult, painful, emotional issues which reoriented the personality, encouraged, and challenged it in the direction of a more mature state of development.¹⁴ This understanding of religious experience as located within the evolving personality was quite different from the typical ecclesiological understanding of religious experience found in orthodox theology. Boisen’s skirmish with his own emotional demons led him to the conviction that a primary location of the divine-human encounter was the struggle of the soul through the recurrent traumatic life upheavals toward emotional health.¹⁵ Although Boisen tended to psychologize the theological notions of sin and salvation in the developing self, he did caution about minimizing and understating the importance of theology in the task of correlating psychology and religion. Notwithstanding that, Boisen was a liberal in that his understanding of the self and his notion of religious experience significantly drew upon the subject matter, emphases, and research methods of modern experimental and clinical investigation. Another contribution of Boisen to this project was his

¹⁴ Anton Boisen, *The Exploration of the Inner World* (New York: Harper & Row, 1936); Howard J. Clinebell, *Basic Types*, 183-217.

¹⁵ Anton Boisen, *Religion in Crisis and Custom* (New York: Harper & Row, 1955).

awareness and focus upon the importance of emotional vulnerability and what one might call a paradoxical feminine quality of active receptivity in the movement of the evolution of the self, and the divine-human religious experience, an accentuation that had not gone completely unnoticed in the orthodox tradition, but was not particularly developed.

A later but even more important figure to the liberal project in pastoral theology and care was Seward Hiltner. Hiltner's model essentially correlated the orthodox themes of the pastoral care of souls with the humanistic client-centered theoretical and clinical program of psychologist Carl Rogers. A classic statement of his liberal project is made by Hiltner when he asserts:

All realms of theological inquiry involve relationship between faith and culture.... At times questions asked within the faith can have at least partial answers within the culture. Material of tremendous potential significance for the questions of theology is now available in the personality sciences. When pastoral theology studies this material, as it pertains to the perspective of shepherding, it is following not a nontheological or an extratheological method but something that is part of method in every branch of theology. Faith can remain faithful and relevant only when it is in constant and discriminating dialogue with culture.¹⁶

New liberal theologies opened Christian pastoral tradition to a method in which theology in the future would proceed in terms of sensitivity to new epistemological and cultural trends. The emphasis given the psychological sciences in pastoral theology, however, created a reaction to perceived imbalances in the direction of the modern project. These so-called disproportions then set the stage for the emergence of the subsequent theological paradigm which sought to provide a solution to problematic elements. The correction came in the next wave of theology, called neo-orthodox theology. This new theological expression sought to correct the perceived weaknesses in the liberal program.

¹⁶ Seward Hiltner, *Preface to Pastoral Theology* (New York: Abingdon Press, 1958), 22.

Neo-Orthodox Pastoral Theology

Neo-orthodox pastoral theology can be best understood as a corrective to the perceived imbalance within the liberal tradition. Among these failings is the notion that, while the liberal tradition has correctly embraced and utilized many valuable insights into the nature of health and pathology in the human personality, enabling ministers to more professionally care for the souls of the laity, there has been a failure to adequately integrate the theology of the church. Neo-orthodoxy lamented that pastoral theology had purchased psychological relevance at the price of loss of Christian identity. The essential concern was that many traditional motifs which characterized theology for centuries were being replaced by a psychological language-game which often missed the substance of the original theological conception.

The neo-orthodox were more wary concerning the effort to correlate two language-games which signified two perceived different realities. They were less inclined to substitute or mingle theological categories such as sin with psychological categories like neurosis. They were more committed to the modern experiment than the orthodox, but less so than the liberals. The neo-orthodox were more acutely aware of the scandalous nature and mystery of the gospel, and possessed a notion of God and Jesus Christ who were more unknown or other than the liberals. Neo-orthodoxy believed that pastoral care and pastoral theology could not easily be modeled upon the theories and practices of modern secular psychotherapy, although that procedure might be appropriate for a specialized type of ministry. Pastoral theology and care would serve both the church and the clergy better if it were based upon the actual practices and realities of the responsibilities of ministers and the actual kind of care the laity expect from their clergy. This school of pastoral theology is represented by the work of Wayne Oates, Thomas Oden, and

school of pastoral theology is represented by the work of Wayne Oates, Thomas Oden, and Edward Thurneysen.¹⁷ These theologians continued to insist that while the personality sciences could play an adjunctive role in the configuration of a pastoral theology, clearly, the primary informants of such a theology had to remain the historical disciplines of Bible, systematic theology, its associate disciplines, and the actual pastoral practice of the parish clergy.

The neo-orthodox emphasized that the fundamental themes, metaphors, and language of pastoral theology must remain steered by religious tradition. The neo-orthodox understanding of religious experience is complex. It sees the experience of the divine, which is an actual possibility, due to the divine search for the creatures, as paradoxical in nature, since an individual experiencing the divine, feels at the same time convicted and forgiven of sin, and drawn deeper into a holy fellowship with God, who then transforms the individual. The neo-orthodox understanding of the self describes the human personality in light of its creation by a holy, loving Creator and often utilizes the theme of human authenticity developed by existentialist philosophers. Where the liberal might suggest greater human autonomy and conclude that striving for self-fulfillment or self-actualization was an appropriate metaphor for the reality of the evolution of self, the neo-orthodox would play down human freedom for an emphasis upon the almost total dependence of the human creature. Any evolution of the self would be seen primarily as an act of the divine loving and grace. The human role would be characterized by an emphasis stressing human openness and receptivity to God as the most authentic manner

¹⁷ Wayne Oates, *Pastoral Counseling* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1974); Oates *The Christian Pastor* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1964); Thomas Oden, *Pastoral Theology: Essentials of Ministry* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1983); Eduard Thurneysen, *A Theology of Pastoral Care*, trans. Jack Worthington and Thomas Wieser (Atlanta: John Knox Press, 1962).

human freedom and fulfillment is authentically exercised in living as dependent creature.

Liberation Pastoral Theology

The pluralistic, multifaceted circumstance of the present state of theology has been present most notably in the struggle to create theologies whose hermeneutic is one of correlating classic theological motifs with specific situations of social, economic, and political disenfranchisement. Traditional liberal and neo-orthodox theologies have been challenged by the various liberation theologies, as theologies that have been formulated from an economically, politically, and socially privileged intellectual traditions many individuals and groups have found confining or even oppressive. These new theologies of identity have argued convincingly that both liberal progressives and neo-orthodox, while certainly differing in their interpretations and accentuation, do not differ essentially in the bourgeois nature, allegiances, and fundamental assumptions of their theological enterprise. Liberation theology brings up the new question about the social location from which the theologizing is being done.

Much ferment in theology today is being stirred up by those who justly ask the question about the identity of the one doing the theology. Today's hermeneutic is one of suspicion, which questions how the various identities that constitute an individual's personality, like those of gender, race, ethnicity, socio-economic status, sexuality, education, and position of power or privilege shape the entire theological enterprise from creation to eschatology. This puts us in a much more complicated position at the beginning of this task of creating a novel form of pastoral theology, than if it were simply a matter of whether we were going to forge either a new type

of liberal or neo-orthodox theology.¹⁸

Theology today challenges one into an original or profound engagement with class, race, politics, or social justice according to liberation methodology.¹⁹ The liberation theologians exemplify a way of thinking in theology which cannot be disregarded. The liberation theologians prompt us into a much more nuanced hermeneutic. In terms of the basic motifs of theology, liberation praxis is emancipatory and understands God primarily as a liberator and religious experience as the encounter with the divine who liberates individuals from oppressive social structures, oppressive persons, and any introjected oppression. While liberation themes are today an important aspect of any practice of pastoral caring, this project will translate the vital theme of liberation from oppression from a moderately divergent angle. The emancipatory themes of liberation theology will be used to counterbalance the tendency within pastoral theology to focus exclusively upon the self and its interior states. The evolution of the self cannot be authentic without serious social, political, and economic engagement and action.

Pastoral Theology as Contextual Moral Theology

Don Browning has built a model that emphasizes a pastoral theology which is a province of practical theology and strives to create a community with a Christian religiocultural world view. This model asserts that pastoral theology is essentially the pastoral task of creating a caring community of moral inquiry. While the minister inevitably must do crisis counseling such as marriage, divorce, sickness, and grief counseling, and while it might be proper to utilize

¹⁸ Charlotte Holt Clinebell, *Counseling for Liberation* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 8-11.

¹⁹ Robert Kinast, "The Pastoral Care of Society as Liberation," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 34 (1980): 125-30.

some strategies borrowed from the secular psychologies in regards to relational dynamics, Browning posits that pastoral care has fundamentally to do not with the techniques and themes of the personality sciences but rather with the “world building task of constructing moral meaning.”²⁰ He offers a challenging paradigm for what he considers the embodiment of pastoral theology and caring as a model of care that accents ethics as prominent.

Browning delineates a multileveled theological hierarchy for pastoral caring that begins with the dimension of preaching and includes growth groups, education and individual work, each of which reinforces the others and all of which have as their main function the building of a community typified by proficient moral value and vision.

Because of the accelerated and complex nature of western society, Browning believes the model of care that will be the most employable and functional is one which assists people in becoming adept at resolving the difficult moral dilemmas and issues that confront modern people. Browning maintains that unless the persons who comprise the church are rooted in a moral matrix of normative language, symbols, and meaning which provide both minister and laity with recognized ethical reference points and contexts, the goals and practices of pastoral caring will be diffuse and indeterminate.

Although Browning does not address the issues of basic theological motifs, which he considers the task of fundamental theology, he has developed a methodology where pastoral theology, which he defines as the duty of preaching, liturgical tasks, and pastoral care and counseling, informs the practical, ethical, and moral theology which structures and interprets

²⁰ Don Browning, *The Moral Context of Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 93.

daily human life.

In any culture threatened by the anomie of daily life, a model such as Browning advances perhaps is the antidote. At the same time, he readapts one of the classic thrusts of pastoral ministry. This model also has the benefit of being very practical and problem-solving.

Browning notes also that persons needing a therapist have emotional problems which are typically too complex for the minister to deal with adequately and still have time to attend to other responsibilities. The person seeking therapy often needs a suspension of the ethical for time and freedom to attend to the emotional. Bracketing of moral and ethical concerns, therefore, compromises the integrity of the minister, who cannot be both pastor, theological ethicist, and indulgent acceptor of free-associating clients with great leisure to explore the various occasions of emotional dysfunction. Browning reasons that when the minister does counseling it must be basically theologically informed moral counseling and not counseling based upon personality theory whose goal is working through unresolved emotional issues. Browning writes:

Some of the psychotherapeutic psychologies entail views of man and the world which are in strong contradiction to the visions that undergird the idea of a worshipping community of moral inquiry. This may not be a problem if these psychologies are used primarily as techniques designed to handle specific dynamic issues in counseling. But such a neat distinction between the culture of these therapies and the central religiocultural vision of the church is seldom possible. In fact, the cultures of these psychotherapeutic techniques can often become inflated and take on the characteristics of religious myth. The symbol system of the Judeo-Christian conglomerate begins to be interpreted with the perspective of certain psychotherapeutic psychologies.²¹

This paradigm for pastoral care and theology as the formation of a worshipping, forgiving, and reconciling theological community asserts that ministers ought to be immersed with the critical moral issues of the day and attempt to assist in the reevaluation and amendment of the

²¹ Ibid., 108.

affirmed public moral meanings of community and society. Religious experience, thus, has as its main proposition the centrality of rational and responsible ethical discovery and behavior. The authentic self would be the responsible, ethical self operating in and from the local church for the life of the world.

Pastoral Theology as Spiritual Formation

Clergy need several models of a practical and pastoral theology from which to operate. Pastoral ministry is complex and there is a need for other models than those just outlined. Pastors have to use whatever model is appropriate for the person they are working with, which means they must be masters of several models, since the laity are not spiritually homogeneous. Some persons respond well to a feminist, liberation model of care, while others respond best to a moral model, while others respond best to an institutional, sacramental, proclamation, or psychological model. Human beings are multidimensional creatures and necessitate a multidimensional approach to pastoral care. Another important model of pastoral care is that of spirituality or spiritual formation. Any thoroughgoing pastoral theology might want to include some dimension of classic Christian spirituality. Models which emphasize these themes have been suggested by both Martin Thornton and Kenneth Leech.²² Thornton posits that the current understanding of morality in the church has become detached from what he believes are its roots in spirituality. He postulates that pastoral practice will lose its historical moorings and go astray if it limits itself solely to the matter of morality. He writes that any divorce of morality from spiritual theology or formation reduces pastoral theology to

²² Kenneth Leech, *Soul Friend: The Practice of Christian Spirituality* (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1980).

at best, a dull and ineffective moralism and, at worst, a set of dreary little rules. A legalist “Thou shalt not” ethic has never found much support in English spirituality and it is hardly surprising that it should not appeal today. Nor is anything gained by maintaining this divorce by substituting what is sometimes called a “positive” ethic.²³

Thornton maintains pastoral theology ought first and foremost to concern itself with assisting individuals to find and experience God, and that, in the process of experiencing God, they will achieve a goodness that is greater, more joyful, and more properly motivated than one which attempts to be preoccupied either with the removal of sin or the achieving of virtue. Concern with morality can prevent moral rootlessness and anomie, he asserts, but it can lead to legalism. While moral theology is certainly important to pastoral theology and caring, Thornton raises questions about whether it should be central, whether it is pivotal in the Bible and the tradition, and what the effects upon the laity are if moral theology is placed at the center of any model of understanding pastoral theology. Thornton states that moral theology is not the principal goal of pastoral care and that pastoral theology should not be primarily founded upon it. He affirms that the real need of the church is for spiritual direction, and the greatest pastoral problem is to construct a theology that meets this need. This model confirms pastors encouraging persons in the discovery and movement through what it considers the stages of spiritual growth. This tradition has developed an entire concrete methodology for assessing the stages of spiritual growth which can be used by the minister for diagnosing and guiding a person in the progressive movement toward the destination of spiritual perfection.²⁴

²³ Martin Thornton, *Pastoral Reconstruction* (London: SPCK, 1960), 22.

²⁴ See also Tilden Edwards, *Spiritual Friend* (Mahwah, N. J.: Paulist Press, 1980); Carolyn Gratton, *Guidelines for Spiritual Direction* (Denville, N. J.: Dimension Books, 1980); Alan Jones, *Exploring Spiritual Direction: An Essay on Christian Friendship* (New York: Seabury Press, 1982).

This model affirms basic theological motifs such as God, Christ, and the developing self by provision of a theology of religious encounter in which the self undergoes a long process of spiritual development through a process of discernment and deepening involvement and relationship with the holy, loving, and living God which is implemented by the minister in the minister's role as theologian, preacher, celebrant, prophet, and spiritual director. Pastoral caring, according to this model, entails facilitating the laity in an understanding of spiritual growth and the movement through spiritual evolution. The ministerial role in this model would involve periodic, individual consultation which focused upon the motifs of this movement whenever the individual needed consultation, but particularly at moments of crisis, where spiritual growth is ordinarily more available due to a gifted vulnerability which accompany and are exposed by such crises.

When negotiated well enough, these crises and the movement through the stages leads to an endpoint Thornton calls beatitude or the vision of God, which features qualities of ecstasy, mysticism, and aestheticism. Thornton labels his pastoral theology, "humanist" and emphasizes that it is a form of spirituality that is not so eager to conjure up strict categories of sacred over against profane. Thornton notes that his model of pastoral care as spirituality contains

Always a certain honest worldliness. The English priest has never taken too kindly to celibacy; he has always inclined to do his duty and enjoy his beer, both without a lot of fuss. He has been trained not in the seminary but in the schools and universities of the land, side by side with his secular brothers-and even sisters.²⁵

A significant element which will be of use for our proposed model of pastoral theology

²⁵ Thornton, *Pastoral Reconstruction*, 37.

is this emphasis upon the religious life as one characterized by the enjoyment and discernment of God and the ability to become one's own spiritual director in a process of self-transcending growth through life's stages. Finally, our pastoral theology wants not only to assist laity to include the theological framing of models and meaning about the difficult, painful experiences of life but also those moments of ecstasy, joy and beauty. Jurgen Moltmann asserts that all theology

springs from a divine passion: that is the open wound of God in one's own life and in the tormented men, women, and children of this world... but for me theology also springs from God's love for life, the love for life which we experience in the presence of the life-giving Spirit, and which enables us to move beyond our resignation and to begin to love life here and now. These are also Christ's two experiences of God, and because of that they are the foundation of Christian theology too: God's delight and God's pain.²⁶

The fundamental themes of pastoral theological models of spirituality have been chosen as requisite components for the articulation of our proposed model.

A Pastoral Theology of the Ever Expanding Edge

The choice of name for our model of pastoral theology highlights the sentiment that the focal point of pastoral caring is located in the human personality. The human self is an evolving self that becomes increasingly humanized and mature as a result of the encounter with God during the two kinds of existential situations which we classify as affirming or opposing edge experiences. This model will be developed by engaging and reinterpreting earlier models in a manner that suits our assumptions about caring. While connected to these earlier models, we hope to provide a differently nuanced theological framework of meaning in which to

²⁶ Jurgen Moltmann, *Theology and the Future of the Modern World* (Pittsburgh: ATS, 1995), 1.

understand pastoral care-giving as the interpretation of the divine-human encounter during common human edge experiences in which the texts of the New Testament and classic spiritual discernment programs are used as a heuristic tool.

CHAPTER 2

A Model for a Scientific Pastoral Theology

Basic Design

This chapter will be a discussion of the structure and method for our intended program of pastoral theology. Theology, as we suggested earlier, is the coordinated exploration and credible demonstration of Christian teaching, and pastoral theology specifically, is the coordinated exploration and convincing demonstration of the discipline of pastoral caring which is informed by this teaching. Every one of the types of pastoral theology explored earlier noted the importance of fundamental theology and its explication of the elementary themes, and all made a serious effort to relate these themes to their model of caring. We too will attempt to do this in a manner which is consistent with our distinctive understandings of the fundamental and vital themes of pastoral theology. This needs to be brought about systematically and coherently by grounding the understanding of pastoral theology and care in a thorough exegesis of the reality of God.

Pannenberg asserts that theology is the effort to understand how all finite things are carved out of the infinite and how all created reality and all creatures are ultimately dependent on God as both the power over everything and the all-determining reality.¹ If we agree with Pannenberg that theology involves relating and referring all things systematically back to God, then the conceptual paradigm that we construct for pastoral theology must accomplish this feat. This theological method is not for systematic theology alone, but for all theological fields, including pastoral theology and care.

¹ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 4.

John Cobb posits that it is essential that pastoral theology maintain a vital substructure in the greater theological project. He articulates our thesis when he quotes Wayne Oates as having noted that pastoral care ought to introduce God by establishing the God-in-relation-to-persons-consciousness into the care and counseling setting. He further cautions us not to assume great God awareness in persons, even church persons, since the course of modernism and secularization has had the effect of making the awareness of divinity diffuse if not obscure for individuals.² He argues that clergy and pastoral counselors are often unduly insecure in their own experience and ability to articulate the reality of God. But unless their caring has at its center a coherent, sophisticated, and experienced understanding of God, their caring will not have a particular Christian or even theological quality, nor will it be the kind of philosophical reflection upon the meaning of the critical moments in life which the laity expect from the only theologians they most often come in contact with, that is, the clergy.

Our design sees the location of the experience of God at the continuously expanding edge or frontier of the human personality. We endorse that God lures individuals into a self-transcending personhood, and we understand the human personality as continuously being drawn into dynamic growth by God. God meets the human at the edge of human personality and utilizes the momentous experiences of human life to facilitate a process of growth in which a person comes to a deeper multidimensional experience of self and God, a process called sanctification in the Wesleyan tradition.

In order to illustrate this claim for a pattern of pastoral theology, several propositions

² John B. Cobb, Jr., *Theology and Pastoral Care* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1977), 43.

need to be elucidated which will clarify the way in which this design works. The model is best grasped by comprehending the fashion in which these fundamental propositions coalesce to interpret each other and accordingly shed light on each other. The interpretive correlation of these subplots will make sense of the overall scheme. However, before this discussion of the propositions can proceed, we would like to investigate the idea of building a pastoral theology upon a model of religious experience as we understand religious experience.

The Prospect of an Experiential Model of Pastoral Theology

In this section we will delve into the theological predicament concerning the constructing of a pastoral theology of religious experience. An experiential model of theology is only one of many possible models. George Lindbeck has developed what he calls a cultural-linguistic paradigm for theological method which is critical of that being developed here, which he calls the experiential-expressive theological model. Our experiential model is essentially the heir of the models developed by Schleiermacher,³ who defined religion as the feeling of absolute dependence, Rudolf Otto,⁴ who also emphasized an essential subjective element in religion which he called the mysteriously awe-filled feeling of the holy, and Paul Tillich, who also implied a subjective designation of religion which he labeled as that which concerns one in an ultimate fashion.⁵ This

³ Friedrich Schleiermacher. *The Christian Faith*, trans. H. R. Macintosh, 2nd ed. (Edinburgh: T & T. Clark, 1928).

⁴ Rudolph Otto, *The Idea of the Holy*, trans. John Harvey, 2nd ed. (London: Oxford University Press, 1958).

⁵ Paul Tillich, *The Courage to Be* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1952), chap. 1

subjectivist tradition understands religion as the most profoundly poignant interior occurrences which the human personality/self is capable of experiencing. The experience described in this particular model is often depicted as an encounter, an engagement, or often a confrontation with God or deeper fragments of the self with which one is not normally directly connected. This encounter effects a reorientation in one undergoing such events in a dramatic way which often includes a deeper appreciation of beauty, people, and the gifted, wondrous nature of existence. The resulting theological model focuses upon these inner feelings, attitudes, or existentialist orientations, and contains aesthetic elements.⁶ There are many advantages to such an approach to theology.

Lindbeck notes that the experiential approach to theology and religion commends itself to a culture like ours that is characterized by individualism, a new appreciation of religious diversity, other religious traditions, and the fact that fewer people are rooted in any religious tradition. Further, if all religions are understood as descriptive of the interior life, then this model is conducive to interreligious dialogue, because all religions could then be descriptions of the core experience of divinity. The experiential model has the benefit of accommodating diversity and interreligious dialogue. It is easy to make a strong case for universal experience of the divine with it, and it also facilitates a characterization of the divine in terms of divine characteristics or attributes as is the case with the assertion that "God is love." For the aspirations of the model we are developing, the experience of the divine can be systematized and understood in an objectified way which allows adequate

⁶ George Lindbeck, *The Nature of Doctrine: Religion and Theology in A Postliberal Age* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1984), 16.

reference to it in terms of reliable and valid norms and criteria for judging the legitimacy of any description or explanation of the human experience of the divine.

One final important feature of the experiential-encounter model is that the reality of the human experience of the divine is not simply a human occurrence, but an event in which God discloses the divine reality and the divine characteristics and being in a process normally designated under the specification of revelation.

The experiential model which we are describing and developing has been also well illustrated by Bernard Lonergan.⁷ It is primarily Lonergan's method that David Tracy⁸ has combined with Tillich's method to create his revised correlational model. The designs of Lonergan and Tracy are being utilized and adapted to propel and steer this project.

Proposition One: The Fundamental Grounds for this Pastoral Theology are New

Testament Scriptures and Human Edge Experiences

The first thesis of our model highlights that the initial problem that any proposed theology must face at its conception is the issue of authority. We need to select those sources which command credibility and are the most valued and trusted by the community of faith for the construction of a Christian theory of pastoral care and counsel. This model correlates textual meanings and human crisis in an integration and delivery of theological meaning and interpretation into the caring relationship.

The two sources which we have selected are both appropriate and adequate to this

⁷ Bernard Lonergan, *Method in Theology* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1972), 101-18.

⁸ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*.

task. These are scriptural themes in the gospels and Pauline epistles and human experience which we define as frontier, boundary or edge experience. We cannot utilize the entire canon to construct this theology. However, it is essential to locate the essential themes of that element of scripture we will use, and then argue a rationale for our selection of scripture and a rationale for those motifs we understand as basic and central, that is, for our own canon within the canon. The first difficulty we encounter in this selection process is the necessity of deciding which texts of the New Testament would be proper to our enterprise and then elaborating a hermeneutic which would be justifiable for interpreting the human edge experiences which possesses multiple attestation and credibility.

We cannot in this project trace the original basic motifs through their historical, doctrinal or theological development, but will pay attention to their development within the interpretive schema of the scholars we use for this project. What we are hoping to achieve is a way in which clergy and laity can use their biblical familiarity and knowledge to serve the task of interpreting edge experiences. The scriptures we are accenting can be hopefully shown to do this.

In the collection of decisive theological sources, scripture takes primacy. If one is suggesting a model for Christian theology, it seems that scripture needs to be an essential component of the data which is used for its construction. The word scripture insinuates that the texts indicated as such are normative for a community. These texts are seen by the community designating them as such, as its chief original foundational documents which need to be consulted as defining texts. The very word scripture announces the indispensable nature of the information labeled as such. Scripture is the data concerned with the way in which a community demonstrates, safeguards, and maintains its identity,

unity, and individuality. Scripture calls the community to allegiance to the themes within scripture and any rethinking or reformulation of a community's theology must be an evaluation of whether the newly articulated theological theory is a satisfactory and faithful witness to the specific tradition. But this is only the start of our understanding.

David Kelsey reminds us that, within the numerous Protestant denominations he researched, there was a broad difference in the way scripture was interpreted and used in the theological life of the community.⁹ One of the most important issues to be dealt with in the construction of a theology is for the theologian to freshly decipher the sacred texts in a mode which is deemed consistent with the routine in which God is perceived to be accompanying and guiding the community. In this construction of a theology of religious experience for a novel form of pastoral care and counseling, we are proceeding with the assumption that scripture is fundamentally a record of numerous and diverse human experiences of the divine and that this document of these religious experiences provides the themes and ingredients which are proper, characteristic territory for the discipline of theology, and that these themes must be central to the caring of the pastor. In addition, we are going to explore the ways in which the pastor will be able to use the sacred texts as a means for discerning the movement of the Spirit in the life of both community and individual, and use the scriptures for assessing spiritual development, health, and maturity.

The other essential source of critical influence for this pastoral theology are those

⁹ David Kelsey, *The Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1975), 96.

experiences that we have dubbed human edge experiences. If theology is to serve its function as an interpretive schema for understanding the world, then scripture needs to be correlated with some aspect of the world. That part of the world which we have chosen to reflect upon are those moments of crucial occasion in the life of a person which possess an extraordinary nature that has a crisis aspect.

The word crisis here possesses nuances of the usual ideas of emergency and distress. But also crisis hints at puzzling, or confounding predicaments in which the experience of crisis has made one aware of the deeper structure and nature of reality and one's unique createdness. Further, crisis here also means turning point, urgency, opportunity, and summons or call.

This second source, common human edge events, often radically calls into question ragged and worn ways of being-in-the-world, and invites us into what can be called a more authentic lifestyle, one patterned by a Christian interpretation of these edge experiences.

Proposition Two: The Predominate Procedure of Examination of the New

Testament Source is a Multidimensional Interpretation of Selected Subject Matter.

The purpose of this proposition is to develop the position that the texts of the New Testament are an adequate and appropriate information base from which to begin the construction of a pastoral theology. In a sense, this proposition would seem almost self-evident. Any theology that labels itself as Christian will need to rationalize and develop its inner theoretical arguments based upon those sources that the Christian community deems authoritatively definitive of its own self-understanding.

When it comes to actual discernment of the divine, the one leading the assessment process needs to possess some mechanism that furnishes the precise information about the

human experience of the divine that is both valid and reliable. We need a source that is accessible to both clergy and laity which genuinely and precisely informs them about the nature of God. We mentioned that scripture is in fact this kind of approved and legitimate theological data base which the Christian community depends upon for critically examining the nature of its inquiry and action and for maintaining and safeguarding the community's identity. Scripture allows all present theological enterprise to be congruent and harmonious with the past and with the community's past experience of God.

One difficult aspect of the whole concept of scripture, as we noted earlier, is the fact that while all Christian communities understand the need to remain faithful to the normative expression of God found in scripture, there exist numerous approaches and hermeneutical schemes for explicating the meanings within scripture. These have led to many varieties and expressions of those fundamental documents. Any attempt at the construction of a novel form of Christian theology cannot hope to get back to the original meanings. One is forced into looking at the original foundational documents and making an effort to understand for oneself exactly how God is experienced as authentically attendant within the community. This fundamental intuitive perception can then be made into a unified, intelligible mode that is, while conceivably personally inventive, also adequately admissible in terms of the current theological milieu.

David Tracy asserts the texts of the New Testament indicate an authentically human mode of being-in-the-world. This project adopts that hermeneutic with slight modification. For Tracy, Christian theology is the philosophical reflection of the meaning

of Christian texts and human experience.¹⁰ We agree, but push this a bit further by positing that scripture also serves as data about the nature and human experience of God. Tracy's understanding of the doctrine of God seems to be an auxiliary hypothesis. For us it constitutes the central organizing concept of our methodological hard core. Tracy's hard core is human experience and is organized more around the idea that all human experience is religious experience and that possibly some types of common universal human experience, which Tracy calls religious, might give us hints about the nature of God. Tracy observes that reflection upon certain 'limit-situations' in human life suggest to him a dimension which:

in my own brief and hazy glimpses, discloses a reality, however named and in whatever manner experienced, which functions as a final, now gracious, now frightening, now trustworthy, now absurd, always uncontrollable limit-of the very meaning of existence itself. I find that, although religiously rather "unmusical" myself, I cannot deny this reality.¹¹

Tracy's method defines reality as religious and therefore, human experience contains a religious dimension, which as Nancey Murphy points out, creates for him the distressing problem of "having defined as religious, experiences quite different from those usually designated by that term."¹² Tracy in this sense is a classic liberal, for he blurs the distinction between human experience and religious experience. This is a distinction we argue is significant. Whereas we contend that God is universally present in human experience, religious experience for us is more traditionally biblical. The experiences

¹⁰ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 3-4.

¹¹ Ibid., 108-09.

¹² Nancey Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1990), 188.

Tracy defines as religious might be religious if people were led to perceive God's love or the impulses of the Holy Spirit during the experiences he defines as religious, but it is arguable whether they are religious in any sense of the word as the word religious is used in the biblical witness. Tracy stands in that Schleiermacher-Otto-Tillich tradition of religious experience, as he calls it. He seems to take more of what we would consider a psychological evaluation of religious experience as opposed to a theological description. Actually, he closely follows Abraham Maslow¹³ in much of his understanding of religious experience and his notion of transcendence. His interpretation of scripture leads him to compose a very philosophical theology. We differ in that we want to make clearer claims about the nature of God. It is not clear with the way that Tracy uses information from scripture that those authoritative texts give us any reliable information concerning God.

This is one of the great problems needing to be resolved in our attempt at constructing theology. For Tracy, God might be found during moments of human crisis, but how does one, in fact, understand God as being there? Tracy asserts God is there when everyday normal assumptions are called into question by the experience of grief, death, or some other urgent scenario. However, we note that the universal human experience of questioning life's ordinary meanings may or may not lead to God or be an encounter with God which these scenarios often open up by providing humans with a newly acquired vulnerability.

Our model understands scripture as a historical archive of diverse religious

¹³ Abraham H. Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak Experiences* (New York: Viking Penguin Books, 1970).

experiences which have been authored, recorded, and revised in various literary styles. It will seek to harmonize and organize these various styles and language in a theoretical framework that can be utilized for the pastoral task of delivering care which enables an interpretive framework for the way in which God is present at crucial edge experiences and as an adequate and credible source for discerning the nature of the reality of God in the life of the lay persons who come to the pastor for the purpose of assisting them in this procedure of discovery and discernment. There are many assumptions connected with this which need to be argued as subsidiary tentative hypotheses, like whether the belief that God, through that loving divine field of force called the Spirit, is able to be experienced by humans, whether humans can differentiate their own impulses from God's, and even whether we can or cannot assume that God the Spirit would be with us in a manner that God the Spirit was with Jesus, with Paul, and with the earliest community of faith as noted in the gospels and epistles of the New Testament. Much has changed in the last two thousand years. But has this period of time, which must be little less than the blink of an eye to an everlasting God, dramatically altered things, whether God or humanity or humanity's ability to experience God, to the point where the primal experiences of the community's normative expressions of the Spirit recorded in the texts under study, even if they were accurate then can no longer serve as guides for discernment today?

We maintain that it is credible to interpret that the records of experiencing God in the New Testament and the ability to experience God today are real historical possibilities and that, therefore, the experiential model of pastoral theology that we are proposing is a fitting paradigm for today. Scripture, therefore, serves for our model as an illustration and a design for an empirical model of spiritual discernment.

John Cobb asserts that the creation of such parameters for enabling clergy to assist the laity in the area of discerning what he calls the incarnating presence of God is of paramount importance for developing a modern pastoral care. Cobb points out that the human capacity for self-deception has made the history of Christianity often characterized by persons who were unable to distinguish their personal desires from the will of God. A crucial role of pastoral theology is to furnish the minister with the ability to encourage a spirituality in which the laity are able

to learn to discern the divine presence in the midst of the chaotic crosscurrents of feeling, thought, and imagination that makes up our experience.¹⁴

The roots of such a spirituality can be discovered within the documents of the New Testament. Because of our assumption that God can be experienced as a historical agent in the specific deep, subtle, but discernible and impelling impulses and inspirations that are actions of the Holy Spirit, we rely on the sacred documents containing those experiences to initiate the formulation of what is the main intent in developing our pastoral theology. We think it feasible to understand scripture today with the same compelling and disclosing dynamism which it had for the early church. Scripture can do this if it is understood as historical documentation which is disclosive of how God is experienced as present within the individual and the community.

The assumptions we make about God and humanity will provide us with the proper heuristic schema with which we can approach and understand the select documents of the traditional texts used for our project. One of the most essential sources of data for any

¹⁴ Cobb, *Theology and Pastoral Care*, 51.

theology attempting to be biblical is the input of the community's theologians regarding those texts. Nancey Murphy points out that the conclusions and discoveries of the community of Christian theologians provide one of the most direct, illuminating, and accurate sources of information for any theological research program and that regularly their findings are essential for novel facts emerging, which she believes is essential for the progression of theological method and program in a way that is truly scientific according to contemporary empirical methodology.¹⁵

When one utilizes scripture as a source of theological data, one is confronted with the difficulty of understanding it and understanding what it says about the fashion in which God is present within history. The significance of Christian texts are that they present the involvement of and experience with a reality classified as God within the gathered and scattered theological community which began as a Jesus movement and continued after his death and resurrection through the leadership of Paul and others who report their own efforts and actions being shaped by a personal divine reality they christened the Spirit, whom they believed to be the efficacious presence of the living God. The references to God in these inaugural Christian documents, because they are references to the experience of the presence of God in original Christian communities, endow us with historical facts about God that should be able to prompt data about the ways God is with the community of faith today. The earliest Christian communities, according to our reading of the New Testament texts, were neither too cautious nor too reckless in their God-talk, but seemed rather to understand that certain impulses or feelings could realistically be interpreted as

¹⁵ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 172.

an interior experience of the divine being.

They also understood that certain other impulses or feelings were not to be associated with the presence of the divine, but rather were properly understood as their personal, distinctively everyday, healthy impulses. Impulses that they fittingly labeled sinful, narcissistic, or unhealthy impulses were those that possibly indicated or invited the understanding that they were normal impulses which had become excessive or went off on a tangent due to their improper sculpting and humanizing by the divine Spirit.

David Tracy uses a Heideggerian phenomenological hermeneutic which discerns the scripture as containing existential philosophical meaning which is ultimately referring to an existential religious mode of being-in the-world that is characterized by notable amount of authenticity. Tracy argues that scriptural texts refer not so much to historical facts as they suggest a broad, religious dimension of imaginatively living in a way where one is called to transcend oneself and live a graced life of authentic, unconditional love toward others.¹⁶ This suggests a position upon which we might build a more detailed description of the faith reflected in these documents.

In his work upon this subject of assessment of the spiritual life, Paul Pruyser expresses the opinion that the clergy are to be guided by the motifs of scripture in their tasks of pastoral caring. Pruyser posits that criteria for pastoral assessment ought not to be primarily or restrictively psychological, medical, psychiatric, or sociological. The criteria should be a fusion of guidelines from these disciplines with biblical and theological themes which produce what he calls valid and reliable experiential differentiations that

¹⁶ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 105-09.

resonate with phenomenological sufficiency, intricacy, and variety. Pruyser proceeds to note seven themes which embody the content of pastoral diagnosis that pastors ought to consider with their parishioners: grace, faith, communion, repentance, providence, the holy, and vocation.¹⁷

In a more recent offering on the relation of scripture to pastoral care, Howard Stone, although wrangling with the medical and mental health model as he calls it, argues that Pruyser has inadequately dealt with the complex issues of theological sources, particularly in the development of some kind of biblical hermeneutic. Stone prefers a kerygmatic notion of pastoral care. Stone posits that the main task of the pastor is to instruct the laity into the “Word of God.” Stone utilizes the theology of the Word of God developed by Gerhard Ebeling and comes up with an idea of pastoral care as proclamation of the biblical tradition. His model of pastoral theology and care focuses upon emphases such as communicating the faith or communicating the word and accents the prominence of topics such as the primacy and the sovereignty of the word, listening for and speaking the word. For Stone’s model, “pastoral care, like all ministry, is at its core proclamation of the word.”¹⁸

The present model accepts Pruyser’s model in a modified way in that it repeals the utilization of medical terminology which is not a part of the local faith community’s language-game. For example, Stone replaces assessment/diagnosis talk with the language

¹⁷ Paul Pruyser, *The Minister as Diagnostician: Personal Problems in Pastoral Perspective* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1976), 61.

¹⁸ Howard Stone, *The Word of God and Pastoral Care* (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1988), 76.

of discernment/spiritual direction. Further, he tries to correct Pruyser's excessive liberal theological tendencies with a classic neo-orthodox counter maneuver by trying to correct what he feels are Pruyser's theological inadequacies, and then develops and integrates Ebeling's theology of the word of God into a model of care.

Thus, scripture can serve in many different ways as the data for the developing of a pastoral theology. The use of scripture in each described model outlined these different ways in which it functioned as a source of data. In some theologies of pastoral care, it was central, while in many it was ambiguously suggestive and served more marginally. In each case its use was shaped by judgments about the way in which God was perceived as present within the community and about the notion of what pastoral theology and care is about. The texts function in a way that deviates remarkably for each system. For our model, scripture serves multidimensionally, but basically in three diverse but connected modalities, namely, as a historical record of human religious experience, as a document that can serve as a tool for discerning the present actions of the Spirit, and also as a way of determining authentic human modes of existence.

**Proposition Three: The Examination of the Edge Experience Source can be
Understood as an Inquiry into the Sacred Nature of the Divine-Human
Encounter**

We have asserted that the task of theology is to meticulously analyze reality and, in particular, religious reality or experience, in an attempt to find constituent inklings that will give us adequate knowledge about the primary object of our search, the one God. If God is not to be found in our experience, but is rather only to be inferred from the logical assumptions with regard to the creation that might lead to discoveries about a Creator as

Frederick Tennant¹⁹ has made with evolutionary theory or John Polkinghorne and Paul Davies²⁰ have made with theoretical physics, then the kind of theology we are doing, as well as the kind of religious experience recorded in the New Testament texts and still reported by people today would be out of the question. The reality is that people do report the experience of God and their experience of the divine leads them to construct theological models and programs to make sense of such experiences.

William James designates religious experience as solemn reactions to the divine. He notes that the most common feeling people have of the divine is a rather indefinite, but limitless impression as though there existed in the

human consciousness a sense of reality, a feeling of objective presence, a perception of what we may call “something there,” more deep and more general than all the special and particular “senses” by which the current psychology supposes the existent realities to be originally revealed.²¹

In his research, James found this confident mindfulness of a presence to be a distinction of both persons who interpreted them theistically and non-theistically. He discovered that along with these common human experiences of “something more,” which are the universal experiences of humanity, there also existed in persons who considered themselves religious, experiences that were prevalently brought to light by a distinctive

¹⁹ Frederick Tennant, *Philosophical Theology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1928).

²⁰ John Polkinghorne, *The Faith of a Physicist* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994); Paul Davies, *God and the New Physics* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1983).

²¹ William James, *The Varieties of Religious Experience* (New York: Penguin Press, 1958), 61.

and notable predicament of distress. These experiences were of a more direct vision of the reality of the consciousness of God and “a perception of a living God’s existence which swept in and overwhelmed the languor of more ordinary belief.”²²

The second primary source of data for the building of our theology of pastoral care is a type of religious experience which James reported over one hundred years ago and seems to have antecedents in the record of the other main source for our theology, the New Testament. The fact that people have encounters with a reality called God and that these experiences impart to them knowledge about this divine reality means we can construct theories about the existence and personality of God. These experiences are what Michael Welker calls human attestations of God’s presence.²³ While these attestations are subject to error and misinterpretation and while the data we get from these experiences needs to be sifted through and systematized, nevertheless, these religious experiences or attestations of the Spirit are a field for the collection of information about God, a place where we need more clearly to discern the nature of the presence of God, and a place where we probably ought to be prepared to expect to encounter God. H. D. Lewis also believed that part of the religious sensibility was comprised of astonishment or wonder at some reality of a mysterious nature which seemed to be in back of or exceeding such experiences or encounters.²⁴

²² Ibid., 67.

²³ Michael Welker, *God the Spirit*, trans. John F. Hoffmeyer (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1994), 46-47.

²⁴ Hywel D. Lewis, *Our Experience of God* (London: Sherwin Press, 1959), 64.

Ian Ramsey, in a tone similar to James' description of the second type of religious experience mentioned above, argued for an grasp of religious experiences as those occasions of abrupt, sudden disclosure where the intuitions gained from the disclosing event had the effect of reorienting the direction of a person's values and life investment.²⁵ These uncanny experiences of "mystery," "something more," "disclosure," or "extraordinary, gracious holiness" are seen and understood, at least with these authors, from a context of theism and both illuminate and are illuminated by the conception of God.

This brings us to an understanding of the fact that the procedure of developing a hermeneutic for understanding religious occurrences means we must develop a schema which involves the interpretation of these processes. Nancey Murphy criticized David Tracy's interpretation of the concept of religious experience as too diffuse by arguing that the New Testament and current usage is more exact. While Tracy might have made a better case for his diluted interpretation of the notion of religious experience, he still refers his ideas of religious experience back to God, only in a more indirect way than Nancy Murphy is comfortable with. We are following her reasoning in this theology.

The point of this is simply to note that religious experience is shaped by an interpretive horizon of experience which is part of the experience. If the experience of the Spirit of God is attested to primarily within interior human experience and the disclosure of God is always mediated by the divine-human encounter, then the human experiencing of the divine effects the perception of the divine. The hermeneutics of suspicion developed by Freud, Marx, Feuerbach, and especially Nietzsche remind us that human consciousness

²⁵ Ian Ramsey, *Religious Language: An Empirical Placing of Theological Phrases* (New York: Macmillan Press, 1963).

not only mediates and shapes perception of experience, but in many cases distorts, falsifies, and conceals it.

Religious experiences do not happen in an ideological vacuum and there cannot be a pure, unadulterated, primal experience of the Spirit. Religious experience is historically and socially mediated and so any location in society and history influences or modifies at least certain elements the experience of the Spirit. The interpretation of religious experience is shaped by all the variables which comprise our existence, including gender, ecclesiastical denomination, socioeconomic-status, political ideology, psychological constitution, and language. These environmental variables provide the matrix through which we experience the divine. What is needed, therefore, is an interpretive schema which can facilitate the most accurate rendering of the experience of the divine and the meanings associated with that experience which can be possessed at the moment.

Interpretive schema have a positive function of providing a horizon which enables us to deal with experiences. Although all theological frameworks are selective and encourage obstruction and restraint, no matter how good any one framework might seem, they are all limiting and thus do us a disservice to one extent or another.

This means that there are no pure primordial religious experiences. Our experiences of the Spirit are similar to our experiences of everything else and hence, subject to the ebb and flow and all of the elements and unpredictable changes, inconstancy, uncertainty, and other vicissitudes of the experiencing self. On top of religious elements in religious experiences, there are also non-religious elements and psychological and emotional projections which make the sorting out of the divine Spirit even more complicated. But

these caveats in no way smother the reliability or valid reality of the divine disclosure and the actual experience of transcendence.

The stream of consciousness is basically complex enough to make us aware of the dialectical implications of human consciousness and the experiencing self. The self experiences divinity and divine impulses in its interiority and these experience are appropriated and shaped by the already existing self and then reshaped by new experiences of the divine resulting in novel images of God which then interact with the environment, through living, loving, thinking, feeling, sensing, and worshipping. These ultimately create more fully-developed, elaborated, and authentically mature and novel actualities and phenomena of God, the self, and the entire nature of experiencing.

The reality of God is, as Pannenberg notes, “not derived from the perception in a disclosure situation, but serves rather to interpret what is encountered in it, proving to be the only possible way in which to view and interpret the content of such situations.”²⁶ Religious experience, while complex, layered, nuanced, containing projections and non-religious elements, and always of suspicious content, expresses for us the encounter with a distinct Other by those who suggest God’s presence with regards to this situation of disclosure. The experience of God is also the history of the encounters of those who have celebrated this Other detected in this experience of disclosure. Further, the information we possess about God is not the result of only one experience, but rather the combined and hopefully corrected and systematized knowledge of this Other that begins, for the Christian tradition, with the history of ancient Israel, and for this project, with a more

²⁶ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 67.

restricted canon of the collective documents of the New Testament.

Each person has a history of God-experiences with the God who pours out the Spirit on those who open themselves to the Spirit in an operative receptivity. The content of the word of God will differ from person to person, but the content will be cumulative and hopefully grow more complex and mature through the evolution of the relationship with God which the church has classically called sanctification. Typically, in the local parish the parishioners have the opportunity to evaluate their relationship with God with the weekly sermon. However, there are particular, exceptional moments in the life of an individual we are calling edge experiences, which are a source of encounter with God which invite intimacy with God in the Spirit and the opportunity for self-transcending growth in authentic, agapic love. These moments of engagement are the location of God's grace and moments which call for the pastor to be present with a theological schema that provides an adequate framework of meaning that can facilitate this authentic Christian personhood.

The extraordinary edge situations are fundamentally of two categories. The first type of experience features a negating or opposing quality such as some urgent existential predicament of distress or crisis that puts one through a spiritual-emotional wringer. The second type of experience is characterized by a life-affirming goodness and beauty and in some cases, a rapturous or ecstatic property. These edge moments are occasions when persons are made vulnerable. This vulnerability yields an opportunity for authenticity and self-transcendence, because God, in these moments, seems to meet us and call into question previous meanings and assumptions which we lived by, many of which led to inauthentic postures which were barely more than poses.

**Proposition Four: This Pastoral Theology will Translate the Connection and
Interplay of these Twin Foundations which does Justice to our Definition
of Religious Experience**

The next methodological task to perform is the demonstration of the way in which the significance and explication of each of our selected criteria for this model, selected New Testament texts and human edge experiences, might be creatively correlated and related mutually with each other to form an adequate model for pastoral theology and care. This means that we will have to demonstrate the validity and reliability of utilizing these texts from the New Testament for the explication of the nature of the God-experience in the life of the parishioner who is struggling to come to terms with the disclosed, novel, mysterious meanings and meetings of the edge experiences. We believe that it is possible to discern trace elements of the divine during moments of wonder and pain that open us up and make us more sensitive to God's presence. Also we feel that the New Testament provides both an adequate and appropriate language and understanding of the nature of these experiences. That is, these texts provide us with a framework for understanding the religious meanings and the theological truths and reality within these edge occasions.

The actuality of leading a Christian life today is still very connected to the leading of that life even as long as two thousand years ago (or more, considering that one of the three lectionary texts for each Sunday is from the Old Testament) and as today we feel and encounter the presence of God, so too did our mothers and fathers of the first communities of faith. If the scriptures are seen as historical documents that, though on occasion may have been miscopied, embellished, redacted, and had their religious truths

expressed in parabolic, poetic or metaphorical language, but nevertheless remain a record of historical encounters with the mysterious Other called God, then that record of individual and communal experiences with God can still be used as a source for understanding them today. This assumes, however, that the God the mothers and fathers experienced is the same God we experience and that this God while surely other, is not so other or so buried under an avalanche of additional human interior phenomena, as to be quite indistinguishable from that phenomena and therefore, from the human being herself. Further, this correlation of sources can only proceed if we also believe that this Other behaves consistently toward us and that any irregularities in our experience of God have more to do with our perception than with the divine being.

Another hypothesis of this correlation is that the location and experience of the encounter with God is during extraordinary human events. God seems to disclose the agapic love most impressively during exceptional human events and circumstances. God appears to have a consistent, well-founded customary and steady history and reality of focal points for divine self-disclosure.

Although there is a holiness to everyday ordinariness, this is not true because God is constantly disclosing divinity or because we are continuously experiencing divinity in an energetic manner, but rather due to the fact that these extraordinary divine disclosures are so powerful and influential upon us that after such astonishing encounters, the perception of ordinary things is dramatically altered. We believe that scripture and our experience reflects the fact that we are typically aware of God's presence and dramatically open to it during uniquely distinctive states of affairs. Divinity transforms humanity through these uncommon encounters and this transformation affects how we understand ourselves,

others, and God during ordinary moments.

Proposition Five: This Pastoral Theology will also Feature an Empirical Method informed by the Scientific Model for Theology of Nancey Murphy.

Marjorie Hewitt Suchocki provides some vital insight into this model of pastoral theology, by pointing out some broad but crucial differences between empirical and classical theology when she writes:

empirical theology refers to that tradition which takes experience itself (variously interpreted) as the fundamental source of religious insight, whereas classical theologians place a primacy on revelation and reason (often speculative) as a complementing source of insight. Revelation is posited as coming into history from a transhistorical source in God, in which case the locus of truth has no essential relation to history; whereas for empiricism, the locus of truth *is* history.²⁷

The challenge for developing an empirical theology is located in the adequate and appropriate adoption of a scientific method that actually adheres to the parameters of what Nancey Murphy calls probable reasoning. There are different ways to define the terms empirical or scientific, as she notes, but for us the most workable program for developing such a methodology for theology would be to utilize the standards she proposes in *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*. Our model agrees that her program has the ability to lead to us to a truly acceptable and genuine scientific research program, one that actually might contribute information about God and the way in which God can be understood as related to and experienced by human beings who need a heuristic guide to assist them in understanding such experiences and encounters.

The essence of a theological system or theological research program, as Murphy calls

²⁷ Marjorie Suchocki, "Empirical and Classical Theology," in *Empirical Theology: A Handbook*, ed. Randolph Miller (Birmingham, Ala.: Religious Education Press, 1992), 83.

The essence of a theological system or theological research program, as Murphy calls it, should be developed around a hard core. This would be in the nature of a deductive methodology that begins with one particular organizing assertion about some theological reality. For Pannenberg the hard core consists of God as the all-determining reality. This understanding of God then leads Pannenberg to develop this comprehension by explicating it in terms of how God the Spirit can have an effect upon people by understanding the Spirit as acting in a similar fashion to a force field in nature which is an open system and then explicating the idea of Spirit as the direct precursor of modern field concept.²⁸ The hard core of our particular project of pastoral theology begins in the next two chapters with an explication of the nature of God and with an emphasis upon the disclosure and perceivability of God. Any theology that asserts the divine-human encounter or experience must make clear how that experience is possible.

Another aspect of a truly scientific pastoral theology which follows Murphy's model is what is labeled the positive heuristic.²⁹ This investigative hermeneutic is best understood as an inventive resource which drives and steers the entire theological program which is consistent with traditional teachings of the church. The development of this particular program for a theology of pastoral theology and care will be driven by many traditional church dogmas concerning the nature of the trinitarian God, this God's self-disclosure, the classic theological doctrine and Wesleyan understanding of sanctification and transformation, and current scholarly debate upon the character of selected New

²⁸ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2: 79-84.

²⁹ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 183-97.

Testament themes.

Auxiliary hypotheses also are a necessity in order to explicate the nature of the hard core. For our model we need several important such auxiliaries. One is the necessity for developing adequate and appropriate criteria for discernment in order to make possible the recognition of the presence of the Spirit within the community of faith. We need to argue how God is encountered by humans and how the marks that distinguish God's presence are discernible and the way in which they effect human personality, what it is that God transmits and precisely what creative transformation actually looks like in terms of the behaviors that it produces. Physicians who have a hard core theme of anxiety or depression have precise guidelines (auxiliary hypotheses) to recognize the symptoms of these syndromes. Similarly, we are arguing that the clergy need such hypotheses in order to recognize practices indicative of creative transformation brought about by the encounter with God's Spirit.

The earliest Christian texts assert that the encounter with God produces critical change in individuals which the gospels label variously "fruits" or "signs" or which the Pauline epistles label "gifts" and "fruits," which indicate that in fact the transformation wrought by the divine-human encounter can be adroitly observed and discerned by the local community of faith.

The doctrine of God in an empirical theology would be developed from the actual experiences of the divine field of self-communicating revelation or disclosure during encounter with God which could be distinguished by the religious community. The hard core explicating the reality of God would then be developed by an auxiliary thesis about the Spirit as holy, loving field of force and an understanding of the actual existential

phenomena associated with the Spirit.

The actual data for theology can come from many sources but the totality of data about God, who is the proper subject of our theology, will ultimately come from the manner in which this theology believes God discloses the divine being in the world. For this venture the data for theology comes from scripture, because we understand scripture as a valid early source and foundation for comprehending the character of this disclosure and the observable human behavioral transformation it produces. Another site for data for this model are additional programs of Christian discernment such as those developed by John Wesley, Jonathan Edwards, and Jesuit priest, Jon Sobrino. All have produced discernment programs which provide authentic, distinct glimpses into the phenomenology of the divine-human encounter. Finally, the human edge experiences themselves provide us with indispensable information for our agenda.

In saying that this theology seeks to be empirical, we are asserting that our research can turn up empirical, objective data that possess the properties of data designated as such. This means it is both reliable and valid, two qualities which define the nature of the empirical. This means that the fruits or gifts of the Spirit can be accounted as accurate and believable measurements of the consequence, accomplishment, distinction, and importance of the presence of God in the world and in the human subject, and so are appropriate theological data for a theological project and for the pastoral practice of caring, discerning God, and guiding the faithful lay persons who desire and need this type of guiding. From this location, our project presently requires the progression toward substantiating and clarifying the hard core of our theological research program.

CHAPTER 3

The Concept, Truth, and Knowledge of God

Theology and the Idea of God

Our design is primarily a model of discernment in which the task of the pastor, in the act of caring for the parishioner, is facilitation of the detection, and encouragement in the productivity of the Trinity. The biblical claims about God's involvement and the discernment of this involvement lead us first to consider the fundamental nature and meaning of the reality designated by the term God. The task of discerning this God cannot proceed without a basic explication of the truth and the reality signified by this term. Before we discuss the subject of God's relation to human interiority, we must explicate what Nancey Murphy calls the "hard core" of our theological research program which is, namely, a sum of a minimum position of the Christian community's faith. This hard core of Murphy's theological research program will steer, focus, and limit the content of our research program.¹ This hard core assists development of the theory as its distinct, characteristic epitome, and innovatively resourceful insight and understanding which commands and energizes the entire research program.

The hard core of our theology of pastoral care begins with the human knowability and the human capacity and endowment to authentically experience the reality of God. Establishing this is particularly problematic and necessary in today's secular setting where the unawareness of God is at least as prevalent if not stronger than the awareness of God. In this age of scientific reasoning, the problem of God has become acute. Since it is often

¹ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 184.

assumed that God cannot be empirically presented, either God is assumed as not being or God is banished to the secondary and optional realm of existence, like that of the humanities. The indifference to or, better, the unawareness of God takes shape in three different forms: an unawareness of experience, an unawareness of interpretation, and an unawareness of decision.² There are many reasons for this unawareness of experience of God and the barriers and snags to these God-experiences have made many doubt the existence of God and thrown up confusion about the nature and makeup of the concept of God for those fortunate sons and daughters who still find the notion and reality of God worth pursuing.

The beginning of our concept of God comes to us from that starting point noted by William James in his demonstration and description of an apprehension or cognition of the human consciousness of a mysterious sense of reality, feeling of objective presence, or perception of “something there,” or “something more.”³ The philosopher of religion H. D. Lewis argued, in a similar fashion to that of James, that more than likely human religious sentiment and predilection flows from the awareness of a mysterious actuality which is “in back of” and “exceedingly beyond” finite reality and which organizes, constitutes, and establishes finite reality.⁴ Earlier, Rudolph Otto sought to point out that rational and sophisticated theologizing is the evolutionary product of reflection upon the primal human

² Michael Novak, “The Unawareness of God,” in *The God Experience*, ed. Joseph Whelan (New York: Newman Press, 1971), 7.

³ James, *Variety of Religious Experiences*, 66.

⁴ Lewis, *Our Experience of God*.

non-rational religious experience of the holy or sacred (*heilig*) which has its roots in the biblical experience described by the Hebrew *qadosh*, the Greek *ayios*, and the Latin terms *santus* or *sacer*. Otto believed that religious experience ultimately can be traced to a *sui generis* mental state that is irreducible to any other feeling-cognition and that the human experience and understanding of God and all later development of the idea of God begins with the experience of that phenomena described by what he labels a numinous *mysterium fascinans et tremendum* which contain elements of creature feeling, feelings of being overpowered, feelings of wonder, awe, urgent vitality, and perfect love. These fundamental feelings are the primary and most basic human experience of religion and, Otto believes, as a theist and a Christian, God.⁵

In an analysis of religious experience of God drawn from an examination of religious language, Ian Ramsey found that religious language uncovers and communicates occurrences that have extraordinary, strange, or peculiar qualities that are nonetheless factual and that these occurrences are both highly personal, in that the person feels that these are gifted with a content personally tailored or designed for one, and has the effect of jolting one out of one customary way of being-in-the-world for a way of being-in-the-world which can be best characterized as having enhanced depth, wisdom, profundity, empathy, and expanded humanity. Ramsey, moreover, detected that religious experiences tend to possess a decisive and definitive feature about them in which the person becomes exclusively entrusted to a new way of being-in-the-world. Religious experiences are extraordinary moments of engagement that are highly personal as well as peculiar in

⁵ Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, 5-25.

nature, which reorient the person to a more refined, humanized, and enlightened way of being-in-the-world. They tend to nudge one to be more involved in the welfare of the entire human race. One's concerns broaden from self or family or tribe or race to the universe of all humanity.

Ramsey also characterizes religious language as typically signifying some type of situation which recurrently provides an individual with some type of novel insight, which can come with an almost jarring suddenness leaving the individual shaken, disturbed, and deeply permeated by it and influenced in spite of the usual short duration of the experience.⁶ Ramsey notes that it is the extraordinary features of human religious experience which make religious language appear exotic, exaggerated, or even outlandish. Religious language is the reflection of the sacred, ultimate dimension of existence which suggests and infuses the living done in the mundane everyday world with a meaning, authenticity, richness, and joy which it would otherwise not possess. Religious language also points to creative, catalytic, transformative moments which move human beings toward their destiny in the image of God.

Frederich Schleiermacher also has made consequential contributions to our prevailing understanding of religion and religious experience. Schleiermacher argued in *The Christian Faith* that piety or religion was based upon a feeling of "absolute dependence."⁷ Otto maintains that "creature feeling" is a better designation in this self-feeling as a real response to a perceived encounter with Another.⁸ In the *Speeches*, Schleiermacher posits

⁶ Ramsey, *Religious Language*, 16ff.

⁷ Schleiermacher, *Christian Faith*, 12ff.

that religious feeling is based upon an encounter with something external to the person that impinges upon the person from the outside, something he called the universum.⁹ The concept of God is his explication for that which gives rise to this primal feeling of dependence.

We are beginning our access to the meaning of the idea of God beginning with these classic expositions of religious experience and feel they are the origin for theology. The reality and mystery of God is key to our understanding the entire concept of religious experience. These basic, diverse, experiential building blocks of theology refer us to a reality called God. Although the reality of God is much more than the human experiences and records of these experiences of God, these experiences are expressive of that reality.

Christian Theology as Pastoral Theology

Individual human experiences of a religious nature can be used to give us a clearer definition of God and conversely, the concept of God can be used to interpret human experience. God's presence and project within our lives highlights one location of a real perception of God within individual human lives at places we call edge experiences. These experiences furnish and confront us with the themes of religion noted above in the classic expositions.

Experiences of sudden disclosure at the edge moments, like all human experience,

⁸ Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, 9.

⁹ Frederick Schleiermacher, *On Religion: Speeches to Its Cultured Despisers*, trans. John Oman (New York: Harper & Row, 1958).

need to be mediated by a framework of interpretation. We interpret religious experience as a divine-human encounter. Religious experience explicates and refers us to the idea and reality of God. Further, personal religious experience is mediated by the history and tradition of experience. We do not have unmediated experiences of the gracious, divine mystery. History and past personal experiences are the horizon or interpretive background for any original experience we might undergo or be seized by. Our understanding of present religious experience or the divine field of force will be vigorously created and shaped by the horizon of experience and interpretation which has forged us.

When we undergo religious experiences of God, it is difficult to isolate the actual primal experience of God from the secondary accretions which surround the primal experience. This makes the perception of God a tricky problem because there exists no unadulterated or unshaped perception of God. There is only a perception of the deity conditioned by a specific historical and personal development and location.

But as new experiences are shaped by old horizons, so too old horizons become reshaped and modified by new experiences. We will explore how edge experiences can enhance, amend, and in some instances, sweepingly challenge or even repudiate earlier interpretive horizons. Both perception and the meaning we give to our experiences exist in a reciprocal nexus of historical flux. The development of our personal hermeneutical framework and its progressive revision calls us from time to time to a fundamental reorientation. This puts us in a position of being-in-the-world in a more humanly authentic manner. The crises of edge experiences provide us with the material and opportunity of a kind that, if we understand the meaning of such instants and shifts, propel us to experience quantum leaps in personal psychic growth and self-understanding.

There are several elements in our experiences which lie obscured within the complex entanglement of the composition of those experiences. These numerous factors intervened to modify the perception of those experiences. The most obvious of these factors is the actual process of human reasoning itself.

Any experience which we have is first shaped by the various factors that constitute the very act of human rationalization. Human thought is a complex process of the human brain. The brain perceives and organizes the realities it experiences according to the laws of nature. It has evolved over millions of years of evolution. It has reached the place where consciousness is a result of complex mental processes consisting of sensory input, perception, learning through human language, and spatial and abstract modes of thought. There exist also emotionally charged modes of thought, intuitive, imaginative, mathematical, and musical modes of thought. These and other nuances in thinking are constituted by complex electrical circuitry, chemical messages running up and down neural pathways, and memories which are imperfect, incomplete, and often distorted records of an individual's past history and history of experience. Each person is also indoctrinated through culture to perceive reality in a particular way.

Human culture is complex. It includes varieties of social and economic location, and political systems. Each culture has distinct gender roles, family and child rearing practices and technological status, language, religious culture, and education. These and other cultural factors also shape the way humans perceive experience. They shape the meanings that we attach to various experiences. This calls us to a great degree of caution as we explore religious experiences. The methodology of the empirical soft sciences can assist us in our exploration and can minimize the human ability to not only misperceive, but also

the human tendency to distort perception through ideology and various types of projection.

Another problematic complication with the perception of experiences of transcendence are what Edward Schillebeeckx calls “non-religious” elements within the field of human psychic life.¹⁰ All experiences within the human reasoning capacity lie entangled within the great intricate and convoluted stream of consciousness. Religious experiences contain not only elements which we characterize appropriately as theological and refer us to the presence of the mysterious Trinity, but they also contain psychological, emotional, and other non-religious components.

This does not mean that it is impossible to trace out and differentiate the religious elements within human psychic life, nor does it mean that ultimately religious experiences are all distorted and therefore, untrustworthy. But it does mean that we need to develop a competent way to discern and interpret any religious intimations. The creative art of theology and pastoral care is knowing how to isolate components of the inner self that actually signify the transcendent deity who engages and encounters us within. This model of pastoral theology and care has a similar approach to the psyche as psychoanalysis. The psychoanalyst primarily searches for psychic elements of emotional pathology in remarks reflecting hostility, anxiety, narcissism, neuroticism, and immaturity. Our pastoral caregiver is looking for other significant psychic elements. These make up what Schillebeeckx labels authentic revelations or expressions of the psychic experience of

¹⁰ Edward Schillebeeckx, *Church: The Human Story of God*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad Press, 1993), 20.

transcendence in holy, sudden disclosure.¹¹

The Experience of God as the Subject of a Pastoral Theology

The search to define and isolate the fundamental religious aspects that are indicative of the transcendent within the extraordinary complex network of the human psyche certainly calls forth from us a delicately discriminating sensitivity. This has been shown to be quite possible, both within the biblical witness, within the tradition of church history, and within the recent scope of theological research programs involving the topic of human religious experience. The term God is used by theists to refer to the general content of these revelatory moments and elucidate the presence, power, and personal reality that is both found and met. The experiential disclosure divulges the presence of a holy Other which we designate as God.

While this Other we call God is experienced within the complex nexus of human psychic experience, and while in fact our experiences of this Other are provisional, mediated and indirect, it is not simply some appearance, likeness, or fragment of God that we see but the reality of God. We might see this Other through a clouded window but it is none other than God that we see. And perceiving God is a process which we are called to become more adept at as we mature. Our focal point lies in locating the fruits of the divine movement within the nexus of human experience.

John Macquarrie has written, "theology without God would indeed be like *Hamlet* without the Prince of Denmark....the whole theological vocabulary is tied in with the word God." He further states:

¹¹ Ibid., 21.

Let us be quite clear at the outset that if anyone wants to construct a theology without God, he is pursuing a self-contradictory notion, and is confusing both himself and other people. He may construct a philosophy of religion ... or he may construct a doctrine of man (anthropology) or a doctrine of Jesus (Jesusology) or an ethic or a mixture of all of them but whatever results from his endeavors it will not be a theology.¹²

Schubert Ogden, consenting with this idea writes, "However absurd talking about God might be, it could never be so obviously absurd as talking of Christian faith without God."¹³ We affirm that the reality of God is central and that further, God is experienced during those momentous occasions of intense profundity and decisive sudden disclosure. Additionally, these moments produce expressions of conversion and human transformation which are reflective of a more authentic appropriation of the divine image.

During these transcendent occurrences, an individual not only is aware of the experience of his or her individual self, in terms of a personal center of identity, will, and power. In addition, there is the awareness and experience of deity or God who is encountered. God is experienced as having a divine, unique, separate reality and center of identity and vitality. It is important that the exploration of the experience that follows not make the mistake of defining and understanding the entire religious experience from the human side. It is meaningful in understanding religious experience to understand the theological content of the interiority and not reduce the interiority to a human self experience. The significant conviction of the experience is that the experience is not only about a higher human self, but of a distinct other. Further, this other is felt as superior, paramount, holy, and indisputably and convincingly genuine.

¹² John Macquarrie, *God and Secularity* (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1967), 37.

¹³ Schubert Ogden, *The Reality of God* (New York: SCM Press, 1967), 15.

paramount, holy, and indisputably and convincingly genuine.

The Knowability of God: Self-Disclosure and Self-Demonstration of the Divine

The discussion of the human experience of the divine to this point has aimed at the perception of characteristics of the divine that the community of faith is convinced are an accurate recognition of the actuality and presence of the living God. However, it would not be enough simply to recognize the fact of the human perception of God. For this might indeed give the impression that perceiving and experiencing God were an entirely human occupation and effort, somewhat like perceiving some other object as, for example, in scientific inquiry and discovery. The available, extensive biblical witness, the long tradition of faith, and present religious experience recognize more of a sense of God's activity in the divine-human encounter. An essential feature and a semantic minimum of the word God, Pannenberg writes, must certainly utilize the reference to an active power. For him, God is a power which determines all finite reality and upon which all finite reality is sustained.¹⁴ The historic self-disclosure of God, suggests a deity who demonstrates the divine reality through performance and achievements of power. If God has no reality, therefore, God can have no power and thus no ability to substantiate and guarantee the divine actuality. If God cannot demonstrate and corroborate the divine self in distinction from human emotion, projection, and other psychic phenomena as well, then the reality of the one God would be a reality difficult to comprehend or explore. The power of God, if God is to be discovered, must be influential and convincing in human experience and religious life. It must be demonstrated within the nexus of human

¹⁴ Pannenberg, *Toward a Theology of Nature*, chaps. 2, 5.

experience within the world, and not primarily thought of in terms of myth or unfathomable, ineffable mystery.

The explication of the manifestation of this God only begins with the perception of this interior experience of the encounter with this mysterious reality who constitutes, permeates, and embraces the course of human life.¹⁵ To establish that God is a reality differentiated from humanity and endowed with a potent, vital energy is only the starting point for theological reflection and the construction of a more precise and exacting comprehension of the totality of the being of God and how this God impacts human reality. We have differing accounts and portraits illustrating this mysterious reality of power, and must discover through our tradition and interpretive horizon, as well as our experience, precisely the kind of power that is characteristic of God and harmonious with the divine nature.

The knowledge that we possess of God comes from the gracious encounters of the divine field of force as the divine reality of the Spirit operates upon human lives. We know God because God is, because God has created us with the rather clever ability to perceive the divine nature, and finally, because God has disclosed the divine existence, power, and identity in recognizable self-demonstrations. Traditionally, the knowledge of God has been understood both in an extensive, universal manner, where the divine power and deity is appreciated as effectively working and perceivable by everyone and also in a more focused point of convergence in experiences and moments where the power of deity seems more profound and concentrated, such as in the history of Israel, the life, death, and

¹⁵ Pannenberg, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 44-46.

resurrection of Jesus Christ, and poignant localized encounters within the community of faith such as appear in the life of the saints. These focused disclosures, while profoundly affecting the recipient in a dramatic personal manner, normally contain a perceived element of universality, and therefore, add to the total cumulative historical disclosure and knowledge of God. Each experience of divine-human encounter is cumulative. The total of the community of faith's shared encounters with the divine make up the available communal information of the divine self-disclosure and self-demonstration.¹⁶

The self-demonstrations of God occur frequently and in different historical contexts and mediating vehicles like prophets, dreams, and scripture, which we understand as recorded experiences of the divine-human encounter. They occur in liberative events such as the Exodus, and in the process of theological reflection upon all of these. The data concerning the reality of God, like God's self-demonstration, comes to us through the process of unfolding history, which means that all the data about the nature of God gathered from historical sources is both a collective and advancing enterprise.¹⁷

The complexity of the historical process of God's self-demonstration brings us to the problem of making sense of the record of the data that we possess about God. If pastoral care is initiating and establishing a personal human existence that embodies existence in a life lived in the loving and saving image of God, then this means that the clergy need

¹⁶ Wolfhart Pannenberg, introduction to *Revelation as History*, ed. Wolfhart Pannenberg, trans. David Granskou (New York: Macmillan, 1968), 1-21.

¹⁷ See Lindbeck, *Nature of Doctrine*; Robert Bellah, et al. *Habits of the Heart: Expressive Individualism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1985); Alasdair MacIntyre, *After Virtue: A Study in Moral Theology* (Notre Dame: Notre Dame University Press, 1981).

a credible base for information which enables them to discern authentic experiences and impulses of the divine Spirit. We have established the belief that God discloses the divine actuality through demonstrations of strength to the theological community. The fundamental record of these demonstrations for the local community of faith is the sacred texts of the tradition found in scripture. The community of faith has, as one fundamental problem concerning God's self-disclosure, not so much a job proving deity, that is God's task, but rather discriminating authentic elements which reflect the knowledge of divine nature within the intricacy of human religious experience from elements in this religious field that resonate primarily with the more mundane human psyche.

The church has approached scripture in numerous ways in the course of its history. Regardless of the hermeneutic finally adopted by a theologian or denomination or school of theological thinking, the problem concerning the language of the biblical witness and the distance between today and the creative souls who first penned those inspired lines is considerable and therefore, problematic. We cannot present a detailed analysis of the numerous obstacles associated with the interpretation of the biblical texts and the hermeneutical difficulties facing us, yet it is essential to at least address one major aspect of this span of time in an approach to our understanding these texts and the modern pastoral caring done by the clergy. The essential hermeneutical difficulty for us is in simply bridging the stretch of events between the biblical then and the contemporary now. A fundamental assertion of our methodology is that clergy can appropriately use a caring model based upon a biblical understanding of discernment rather than a caring model based upon personality theory and counseling.

Inasmuch as the themes of encountering God and being sensitive to the impulses of

the Holy Spirit make for a common thematic horizon between the texts of the earliest Christian communities and clergy and the present Christian communities and clergy, this amalgam of horizons called for by current theological projects to utilize scripture as legitimate data for research is made difficult by much of the stylistic, rhetorical, and historical world-view between the biblical setting and the current *zeitgeist*.

Our position is that too much can be made of the gap between the biblical then and the contemporary Christian now. Since we actually share a common horizon of existence within the same historical process as the first Christian community, and given an admissible hermeneutical method, the scriptures can serve as appropriate and adequate data for the theological construction of a pastoral theology of religious experience and care today. There are many functions which the texts of the community of faith cannot perform. They are not exclusively an account of history and can no longer be used as a literal record of historical events. Their historicity and, thus, utility for us lies in the fact that they convey early records of religious experience where humans encountered God.

There are many functions of scripture and many forms that scripture takes. But there are within the sacred texts of the community, lucid accounts and hints of the divine-human encounter and a significant amount of data pertaining to distinguishing between the divine reality and the human reality. Scripture can serve as data for us if we seek to explicate the same kind of contemporary events that scripture sought to understand at the time it was written. This indicates a number of auxiliary hypotheses about the nature of scripture and God needing to be understood and to which we now turn.

The first feature about biblical texts we need to appreciate, if we are to use them as

theological data, is that the material within scripture cannot be explicated as a record of things that happened only once never to happen again. The only truly singular recorded historical experience in the New Testament is the event of Jesus' resurrection from the dead. This event, as far as we know, never happened before or since. This does not rule out the possibility of resurrection happening again. The point is that it is unique and in that respect is more akin to another singularity, the creation of the cosmos. The rest of the chronicle of scripture, particularly that portion of scripture in which we are interested for this project, namely, the accounts of the content of authentic religious experiences contain nothing unusual or unique, but rather common features and traits generally associated with religious experiences. What makes scripture remarkable is not the uniqueness of the content but rather the accuracy of the content. Scripture as a record of the experiences of people with God has its place within the life of the community of faith because it passes the test of truth and therefore, according to the standards of the scientific method, is both valid and reliable in terms of the data it gives to us about the nature of God and the ability to distinguish and discern the impulses and operations of the divine spiritual field of force.

Scripture can be true in different manners and other theological models display the manner in which scripture is genuine in metaphorical, poetic, philosophical, and mythological ways.¹⁸ For our aspirations, scripture is accurate in that it authentically attests to the nature and reality of God and provides guidance for distinguishing the divine self-disclosure according to the standards of scientific probable reasoning.

¹⁸ See Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 240-57; Hendrikus Berkhof, *Christian Faith: An Introduction to the Study of the Faith*, trans. Sierd Woudstra (Grand Rapids: W.B. Eerdmans, 1979), 77-89.

The evidence for God's reality does not only reside within the sacred texts of the community of faith but also within the community's current life. The scriptures therefore, serve as an authentic expression and exposition for the present reality of God's nature and closeness. Pastoral theology and care do not necessarily have to borrow from and be reformulated from secular theoretical disciplines such as personality theory or medical models as Seward Hiltner postulates. It can remain with traditional theological subject matter and simply apply the rigors of the empirical method in the investigation of these themes which lie within the realm of its discipline. Our approach to the divine self-demonstration asserts that this revelation is historical and, as historical, can be investigated and scrutinized like any other historical reality.

The record of the historical divine-human encounter accounted for within the sacred texts of the community will be and has been supplemented by further divine self-disclosures. It is the nature of God to continue in relationship with created humanity and this means continuing the process of divine demonstrations which add to the depth of our knowledge about God. The traditions of experiences which comprise the horizon of interpretation shape our perceptions of God and in turn are shaped by new experiences in the dialectical process of revelation. Therefore, the tradition within scripture provides what the community believes is an authentic and credible witness to the divine-human encounter, and the tradition of continuing witness supplements the earliest record.

This serves as a creative catalyst for theology and for discovering the current impulses of the Holy Spirit. Since the Spirit is still operative within the historic process, there has arisen new data that provides a credible supplement to the discernment data within the New Testament, such as the details established by more recent authors whose works we

will look at later. Our pastoral theology can concern itself with the unearthing and illustration of the historical religious experiences within the scripture and within the horizon of tradition which seeks to understand and discern the activity of the Spirit for the present. This can be done because of the essential harmonic oneness of the historical process and because of the essential harmonic oneness of the living God.

In the sacred texts of the Christian community we find not truth that is unreachable by empirical scientific research, rather we find in the tradition of scripture, unique and distinct religious substance and episodes that are accurately the field and specialty of theology. Scripture is a document in which is recorded the self-demonstration or revelation of God and can facilitate and enable the recognition of God in the vitality and activity of the modern, local community of faith. Our pastoral theology of care narrows itself to the discerning of the impulses of the divine within the individual life lived out in the local community of faith. There is a crucial link between the reality of the divine self-demonstrations and disclosures, the authenticity of them in the historical biblical record and the life of the community today.

Although the task of the theologian is to construct novel theological models from the remains of old systems and through the modification of existing systems, this must be done within the lines of demarcation set by the entire Christian community, which as we have noted, is a diverse unity. This brings us to the varieties of church expression.

The Community of the Divine Self-Disclosure

The hard core of this proposed theology of pastoral care maintains the knowability of the divine being. If this theology purports to be scientific, then it must show evidence for

the belief in God. This evidence must be both reliable and valid. Reliability means that the evidence that we believe shows the existence of God can be shown to be predictable and recurrent. Empirical theology rejects the idea that God is only available within a special salvation history outside of the normal historical process and that God no longer behaves currently as God did in the past. The disclosure of God is an ongoing process that can be understood as happening today as it did in the past. We should not be put off by the fashion in which the divine revelation is often depicted in the biblical witness and in the tradition, for the extraordinary theme of divine self-disclosure is often framed in an uncanny style. The primary point is the reality of the divine-human encounter.

If people write in a different style today about God, we should not confuse this with the fact that although literary styles change, the subject of theology still remains reflection upon deity. If God would not demonstrate or disclose the divine nature, it would make theology a difficult undertaking. If God would not demonstrate and disclose the divine nature tenaciously and faithfully in accord with the divine nature, it would make theology and particularly scientific theology impossible. It is not enough for God to be knowable. God must be consistently knowable in accord with the nature of the divine being. If God possesses an essential characteristic of agapic love, then the actuality of this attribute ought to be experienced consistently as a part of the divine nature for those who describe religious experiences as encounters with God. In our age of secularism, whatever is found credible must supply reasonable endorsement with the prevailing criterion of confirmation. That is not to say that this theology is written only as an a kind of apologetics to help the

Christian community live more justifiably with its convictions in the secular scientific society. This theology is written fundamentally for ministers who need some guidelines for making sense of their pastoral work with individuals concerning a theological appraisal of the personalities they live and work with in their local communities of faith. While the subject matter of theology, which is the science of God, is unique to theology, and theology seeks to explicate Christian belief and practice for the church, this can be done through a method which is satisfactory to the standards of reasonable probability which are the foundations for modern epistemology.

Therefore, the reliability and regularity of God's demonstration is essential for both church and world. This brings us to the fact that the total church community must be confirming a consistent experience and theology of the divine nature. Therefore, a theology of discernment such as we are proposing needs to be based upon the findings about God of the entire community. In short, reliable theology will be a historical and ecumenical theology and will utilize the different traditions and expressions of the experience of the divine to come to conclusions about what constitutes authentic data that reflects the reality of the divine nature. The selection of information about those elements within religious experience that give us authentic knowledge of God must show that this data is an accurate measure and this means authentication by saints, laity, clergy, and theologians across the spectrum of theological and denominational expressions.

Communal sanction must not only come from various denominations and various theological persuasions within denominations, but must also be endorsed at the various levels within each denomination. The criteria that marks the distinguishing signs of the

divine Spirit can not be only the preference of the clergy or professional theologians or marked and attainable by only the most exalted holy saints, but must reflect the entire *oikos* and *laos* of God.

If in fact there is agreement upon the criteria that differentiate the authentic interior reality of God within human religious experience across denominational, theological, and categorical classifications of the people of God, we can feel certain that the criteria satisfies the necessity of reliability of assessing the experience. If the encounter with the divine does in fact produce marked, observable behavioral changes within the life of the person open to God, then these traits ought to be both dependably consistent with the nature of the divine reality and generate compatible qualities in individuals. The Roman Catholic Church has established appropriate and adequate criteria for determining and distinguishing the qualities that go into the making of sainthood. These are utilized in the process of canonizing individuals.¹⁹ These attitudinal and behavioral qualities are understood as the evidence of influence of the divine. They are utilized by a committee who then decides whether the individual under consideration thoroughly embodies and incarnates these qualities. Those under consideration for ordination within The United Methodist Church are also scrutinized by a similar kind of discriminating assessment before elder's orders are confirmed upon them and they are appointed to represent the ministry of Christ in a particular manner for the local congregation. The paramount point under consideration here is that a theology that strives to be scientific must reach conclusions which are based upon data that can be discovered and examined by anyone

¹⁹ Kenneth Woodward, *Making Saints: How the Catholic Church Determines Who Becomes a Saint, Who Doesn't, and Why* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1990).

and must be recurrent phenomena.

The second quality that data must possess if it is to be scientific is that it must be valid. The data must be accurate and construed as accurate and authentic. Often in an attempt to measure one phenomenon, other phenomena or variables intervene which cause the measurement to be inaccurate or a measurement of something else rather than the subject under consideration. Validity is closely related to reliability, but there is a difference and that difference has to do more with accuracy than repeatability of the events. The impulses of the divine effect everyone and are discoverable by everyone, particularly every community of faith, both past and present. We posit no special knowledge of God which is available only to certain individuals or communities. God demonstrates and discloses deity recurrently throughout the historic process, providing a repeatable phenomenon. Further, there exist criteria and means for accurately differentiating the divine influence which appear communally and with which there is agreement about authenticity. This provides validity to those events we are measuring. Religious experience can be subjected to psychological evaluation as Hans Kung has shown us with his insightful utilization of classic Freudian psychoanalytic theory to uncover narcissistic and what he calls neurotic elements within religious practice and experience.²⁰ Yet he reminds us that while psychology is useful in uncovering such pathological elements in Christian religious experience, psychology cannot enable us to distinguish between true and false claims concerning knowledge which has an actual connection with the nature of the divine

²⁰ Hans Kung, *Freud and the Problem of God*, trans. Edward Quinn (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1979).

because that is outside the sphere of psychological investigations.

It is important to note that theology has always been concerned with the reliability and validity of the human experience of God. The gospel's consideration of the dilemma created by the false Christs, who seemed to be some type of theological pretenders and Saint Paul's apprehension and distress over certain spirits that were, as he believed, not of the Holy Spirit, indicate that the church has always struggled with the problem of discerning authentic from inauthentic religious experience. Yet the riddle concerning the enterprise of discernment between biblical categories of true and false, sacred and profane, holy and unholy religious spirits or to phrase it in a more modern philosophical means of expression distinguishing between authentic versus inauthentic religious experience brings us to another crucial issue, that of pluralism and diversity within the Christian community. We need to speak briefly about this question.

Diversity Within the Christian Experience of God's Self-Demonstrations

One of the issues we need to sort out will be locating and systematizing criteria for pastoral assessment which is specific enough to be of value to the minister whose responsibility it is to offer a diagnostic that is agreeable to the community of faith at large. Religious experience is greatly affected by the context in which it is set. Thus, even within the earliest recorded texts of the Christian experience of God, there is found not a uniformity but rather a diversity of experience, all of which is believed to authentically reflect the real nature of the Spirit of the one living God. We do not possess one experience of God, rather we have a record of what appears to be divergent experiences of the one God. The hope of this dissertation is that even within those divergent experiences and all their richness at least enough of an agreement might exist to maintain some semblance of

orthodoxy. Not that orthodoxy is our aim, indeed love is our aim, but we must try to come to some agreement about what love looks like for the purposes of our pastoral work and the assessment of our own and other's character and growth in God as God invites us into the grace, joy, and beauty of the holy, trinitarian existence.

If God is consistent within the divine nature, and if we accept the elementary fact of the active and recurrent divine self-declaration, then, although there might exist some areas of strong disagreement about the divine nature, it is not at all unrealizable that the community of faith can agree on a number of essential qualities about the human encounter with God. In fact, the hard core of Christian faith and belief about God ought to have been discovered by most if not all communities of faith that have not isolated themselves from other Christian traditions nor allowed ideology or other non-religious aspects of religious experience to overwhelm or otherwise seriously cloud any or all experience of authentic divinity. Thus, the hard core of theology, which we posit is that the trinitarian reality of God is knowable as holy love and covenant faithfulness in the divine activity as defenseless, superior power determining everything should be relatively secure across categorical lines. It is only when we begin to draw auxiliary hypotheses like fashioning a spirituality of beauty or a theological ethics that one might expect to find serious conundrum concerning diversity. In fact, the agapic love of God is probably not questioned in any community of faith, whereas positions on some of the actual issues of the day such as, for example, gun control or abortion or sex outside of marriage present greater problems of coherence.

It is our belief that a high level hypothesis about the nature of the goal of the human

personality for use by ministers in pastoral work can be fashioned with a great deal of communal agreement at a level that allows for actual valid assessment of the personality. This can be done without going too far down into a level of analysis or investigation where we are forced into more concrete, specific expressions of those traits, which would be the arena of theological ethics. The general goals of the human personality are faith, hope, and love and the various nuances of these. We would expect all mature Christians to be seeking these and seeking to express these in all things and concerning all issues. Yet the conclusions Christians reach about certain issues will be different, even while they are expressions of mature, agapic loving.

One safe way to speak of ministerial assessment of individuals and their development in accord with the gracious, divine Spirit is to speak not so much in terms of specific traits of character but rather in terms of holy tendencies that the community of faith believes are the qualities which emerge from fellowship with God and the resulting God-consciousness of the human personality whose personal identity has been grounded in God. These tendencies are shaped and effected by conferred genetic, environmental, psychological, and sociological reality, but they ultimately transcend them. We will be exploring these tendencies in later chapters.

The need is to present a schema which is specific enough to be useful in the work of pastoral discernment and illustrates the connection between the divine nature, how the divine nature operates upon and infuses the human personality, how this operation can be distinguished from the entire nexus of the human psychic field, if possible, and the precise manner of the outward effects of the Spirit in an individual's life. The biblical terminology for these outward observable marks used by the earliest communities were

gifts, graces, or fruits, and were believed to be defining results which then served as parameters indicative of authentic encounter. This is an important element needing to be appreciated. The reality of the human experience with God created a noticeable, empirical change in the attitudes and behavior of persons. The reality and nature of God and God's attributes were understood from the consistent way in which God declared and demonstrated the divine self and from the unwavering, dependable manner in which people were markedly changed from what they understood as an encounter with God.

The meta-themes of repentance, sanctification, and deification permeating the New Testament indicate the process of change that the creatures undergo during and following an authentic divine encounter. The communities of faith represented in the biblical traditions codified and circulated these records of human transformation which then served as criteria for assessing the authenticity of the human report or query of a divine-human encounter. In many respects the church has always understood itself as a community whose gift to the world was to pass along what it felt to be accurate theological and theological anthropological reflection concerning one of its major themes, namely the aftermath upon the human self resulting from experiences of encounter with God.

The church is a group of humanity living out what it means to be created by the God who has declared the divine self to humanity. If God is absent or dead for the world, this has never been the case with the church, for the church is nothing more than conscious theological humanity living a symbolic existence in anticipation of the future when God will consummate both individual and cosmic history.

Thus, the scriptural record serves as a witness to the notion that creatures ought not

fail to experience the Creator. Also these experiences, the report of them, and the theological reflection and elucidation of the meaning of these experiences present us with the fact that faith is not merely an option for humanity as though it might be one of many philosophies or political parties to which one might align oneself, but rather a constitutive factor in the fundamental nature of what it means to be truly human. The New Testament texts present to us one of the most profound God self-disclosures accessible in history to us, that is, the divine disclosure in the person of Jesus Christ. The New Testament furthermore, introduces a multiplicity of theological reflection on that revealing reality and offers us data that we can use for reflection to enable the distinguishing of further divine self-disclosures. There is an abundance of the reports of these disclosures within the New Testament texts, and the New Testament connects these acts and the report of these acts to Jesus, insisting that they continue to be brought about by the divine field of force and calling them acts of the Spirit. There is in this multiplicity of sacred experience and reflection on sacred experience both diversity and unity. There is enough diversity to counsel caution when we attempt to speak about and interpret what we consider to be divine experiences. Fortunately for inquirers, there is also enough unity, similarity, and agreement upon what is actually authentic that defining criteria can be both reliably and validly established for discerning these experiences. In fact, scripture itself sets the precedent for such a practice.

Each biblical community of faith that recorded its unique experience of discerning the divine had its own backdrop in life. For each, a distinct setting of experience was in place as each community sought to experience the divine and draw out of these experiences a response that was proper and adequate for the liturgical, moral, and

doctrinal issues which they felt compelled to address in their response and solution to these divine-human encounters. Much of the theological diversity within the New Testament comes from the issues that a particular community was struggling with and the already existing social norms, mores, folkways, and so forth in which the divine self-declaration was received.

Still, each community seemed to struggle with very similar themes as a result of their divine experiences. While the forms of the liturgical, worship cult were dissimilar, each community believed in creating worship settings as an appropriate response to the changed experience of themselves and the world that the divine encounter placed upon them. Worship was understood as an appropriate expression for overcoming the separation from God by creating a communal setting for divine self-disclosure where one was aided and encouraged by numerous mechanisms to incite and excite such encounters and sensitize the individuals in the community toward God through such instrumentalities and agencies as hymns, prayer, sacraments, and reflection upon authentic, sacred texts.

Participation in the energies of divine life through worship was always understood as the natural and expected human response to God. The form of it was variable. Each community also noted that an authentic experience of God produced in an individual a desire to change and to live a more holy life. There was a high probability for this as a typical response. The precise behaviors of this holy life varied from community to community, but still the actual experience of God's holiness incited a strong desire in an individual to explore the meaning of that event and to become holy also in and through the context of a process of discernment in a specific local community of faith under the

tutelage of a discerning person, normally a bishop or elder.

Each community therefore, sought to secure the love of God in its own loving and avoid alienating itself from God by the real circumvention and evasion the kind of behaviors they thought inappropriate to the divine force and an inadequate expression and desire of the divine which they labeled as taboo or sinful. In the course of developing and expanding its response to the divine, the early church evolved areas of theological morality and ethics, character, values, codes of conduct, instruction, cultivation of the spiritual life, discernment practices, a canon, and ultimately, more refined dogmatic and theological assertions, and principles of ecclesiology and polity which touched every aspect of its life. The experience of God was such that the actual encounter with the divine brought with it a reorientation and reevaluation of the totality of life. The diversity among the scriptures indicates that different communities had different responses. Nevertheless, the earliest writers attempted to sort through the difficulty presented by the amount of diversity in the responses of the various communities to the divine action in Christ and attempted to distinguish between designated certain behaviors as God-driven and others as more self-driven.

In spite of the diversity, we believe there exists enough agreement and overlap concerning the criteria coming from these diverse communities about what constitutes authentic general trends in behaviors and qualities of character and selfhood which makes establishing a legitimate guide for today an attainable task. Ministers today probably use the criteria established in the original sacred texts of the community to deliver weekly sermons on the above mentioned subjects of Christian life and also utilize these same texts in some fashion in their pastoral work for critiquing and guiding the laity under their care.

The scriptural signposts marking discernment of the Spirit's work will, for this project, be further supplemented by criteria developed by recent theology and some of the saints of various Christian traditions.

The Justification for a Christian Discernment Formula

We have explored the reality of the divine self-demonstration and indicated that the entire doctrine of God advocates an impetus in the direction of trying to understand and sort out the discovery of the divine activity within human life by turning to those resources within the tradition which initiate that work. The tradition not only makes us aware of God's presence, it encourages us to discover this presence for ourselves within our own interiority, as well as cautioning us that everything within that inner human psychic field is not necessarily an expression of the deity.

This actuality induced the biblical communities of faith to establish and develop certain criteria indicative of divine authenticity and provided them with perceptible verification. Early communities utilized a theological language to describe this reality, namely, the language of the New Testament. Their belief was that a reality they labeled God affected them in such a way that only a God language would adequately articulate that experienced reality. They wrote in a way that brought home the encountered dynamism and intensity of the experience with that divine reality. Theological language developed to describe a theological reality that was perceptible within the human psychic field. This special language is still warranted in the description of that reality for the task of our pastoral theology and care as we have delineated it. We want to avoid in this project, a tendency in

into a psychological datum and a theological explanation.”²¹

The obvious problem with this is that if the allusion to the activity of God is omitted from the description of the reality of religious experience, then any acknowledgment of the divine spirit in the explanation will be impossible to rationalize with any credulity. Theological language cannot be understood as an early form of descriptive psychological language. The issue here is utilizing the most acceptable, accurate, and adequate language. The standards of description which are best suited for spiritual discernment and formation are those discernment programs which have evolved in the course of the historic tradition. These Christian epistemic practices may provide that specific kind of assistance which are a necessary supplement to the biblical material.

Therefore, we will be focusing upon and employing a language which most accurately emphasizes and illustrates our task. We need a language specifying how to identify God’s actions and parameters concerning how we might use such language. Before we can develop these parameters, we need an exposé of the constitution and efficacy of the divine, in order to explicate why the parameters we ultimately choose are congruous with the divine nature and the most appropriate ones. We now turn to an account of our hard core, the divine reality.

²¹ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 160.

CHAPTER 4

The Trinitarian God

The Essence and Urge of the Divine Persons

We have now established the necessary framework for our thesis in terms of how God in the biblical record is experienced in the depths of the human interior as a dynamic impulse and power who demonstrates and substantiates the actuality of the divine self. We noted some of the important qualifications and limitations which are necessary to remind us of the fact that the divine self-demonstration is indirect, transitional, fragmented, and often subtle. We have also seen how revelation occurs in the tangled network of human history and nexus of the human psyche, but that, nonetheless, it is still quite within the realm of possibility to differentiate, through a process of communal discernment by criteria established by the church, authentic from inauthentic experiences of the divine nature and operation.

The notion of revelation also asserted the impetus of God not only to create but to communicate the divine nature and to assist in the discernment process. God assists with the human understanding of the divine being. We called this the knowability of God. This theology of pastoral care posits that the basic task of caring which employs a minister is engaging the laity in a process of discernment of the divine purpose and action due to this open knowability of God that is made possible by the power of God's nature.

Having established the manner in which God declares and demonstrates the divine self, it is necessary to endeavor to speak about the nature of this power and reality of the one living God. What is of interest to us for this thesis is the work, action, and effects that the trinitarian God has on the believing person, that is, the person living within the local

community of faith, the person with whom the pastor of that community is on a faithful journey to grasp and love God more completely, who wants to know how God can be discerned within his or her individual life and what the outcome of God's presence might look and feel like. The expression of the Spirit and therefore, the experience of God is neither capricious or nebulous. Exploration for distinct, unclouded intuitions into the nature of the concretions of the Spirit is not without difficulties, but it is possible.

Michael Welker, a leading authority in pneumatology, reasons that although there does seem to exist a cult of the Spirit's indeterminate and indistinct qualities within the Bible, these references seem to be connected not with the work of the Spirit upon the human personality but are rather associated with nascent patterns of natural theology and found primarily in the biblical wisdom literature and in reference to an experience of the Spirit associated with non-Israelites.¹ There does seem to be concretions of the Spirit whose understanding is problematic in terms of their clarity, but Welker insists the majority of attestations about the Spirit testify to its lucidity and comprehensibility.

The problems connected with a doctrine of God are the pivotal concerns in theology, since God serves as the central image and reality of that enterprise called theology. In the research schema that Nancey Murphy suggests for a scientific theology, the doctrine of God represents the hard core of our program. This hard core or central organizing point of convergence defines and limits the nature of the rest of the program which is comprised of various auxiliary hypotheses. Therefore, we needed to show first of all how precisely God is knowable and could become the object of a scientific theological research program

¹ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 101.

in accord with soft scientific standards of probable reasoning.

The reality of God only needs to be discussed here in terms of the qualifying factors of our focus. Our theory is about how the divine reality acts upon and can be recognized in the process of spiritual discernment by clergy using relevant and authentic criteria for judgments that have been established by the community of faith over time as reflective of the divine influence upon human character. The elements of the doctrine of God that concern our interests here are an account into the nature and working of the divine that justify the suitable criteria that are ultimately selected as the appropriate ones.

We must look to a doctrine of God which allows for the perception of the reality of God in both the description of religious experience as well as in the explanation. The biblical descriptions of God and the human experience of God affirm God as possessing qualities that we have come to label as reflecting *personhood* or *character*. These qualities of God have been best explicated by fathoming deity as Trinity and developing a thoroughgoing notion of God as trinitarian. The doctrine of the Trinity is a conceptual development of the experience of God as the one source of all reality. It relates the concept of God to the tangibility and particularity of the reality we know and meet in the experience of God.²

The manner in which we talk about God's qualities of personhood are an outcome of the interaction of the reality of the three divine persons. The various relations among the persons comprising the divine mystery constitute the fundamental personal character of

² Pannenberg, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 26-28.

the reality of God. The essential point behind any discussion of the personal nature of God is that the three divine persons of the Godhead interact. Biblical language utilizes a personal concreteness in its concept of God and this personal nature seems primarily to be about the communion between the three divine persons and the relationships between the three divine persons and human persons. If accurate statements about God are due to the divine self-disclosure, then we must appreciate what the personal quality of the biblical language seeks to convey about the nature of God. Our knowledge of the personal characteristics of God come from God's demonstration of the mysterious, divine nature in three persons.

The Trinity as the Personal Character of God: Jesus and the Father

The most basic event in the understanding of the Trinity is the message of Jesus about the coming of God, whom he called Father. Jesus proclaimed and experienced a God who was drawing near to humanity in Jesus' own work and proclamation. This closeness to the coming self-declaring divine mystery created in Jesus an experience of such remarkable familiarity and intimacy that Jesus called the divine mystery 'Father.' We discussed in the last chapter the revelational character of the experience of God. What was said about the self-demonstration of God can now be stated in further detail. The self-demonstrating one God not only discloses deity, but discloses the divine oneness as Trinity, that is, as deity in three persons or concretions. The self-demonstration of God discloses a threefold interdependent self-distinction within the Godhead. This reciprocal self-differentiation comprises that which we understand as the essential *personal* nature of the Godhead. The beginning of our understanding God as Trinity begins with Jesus' consciousness of the closeness of God whom he called Father.

When the theological thought of the Hebrew culture encountered the theological thought of the ancient Greek world, the result was a mongrel theology that combined the three categories of divine attributes which these two cultures arrived at concerning the divine characteristics. These three categories involved attributes of the divine spirituality or personhood and included characteristics such as knowledge, will, relationality, life, freedom, and unity, attributes of the divine character such as righteousness, goodness, loving, truthfulness, righteousness, and graciousness, and the divine metaphysical or ontological attributes such as simplicity, infinity, immensity, eternity, and immutability. The theological struggle has always been to relate these categories in a logical and consistent fashion according to the experienced encounter with the divine and the current manner in which the world is understood.

But the idea of the personhood of God did not come from Greek metaphysical concerns but rather had its beginnings in the relation of Jesus to the divine reality he experienced intimately in his person and work and called 'Father.' The overriding disclosure in the preaching of Jesus was that the divine reality was drawing near to humanity in the ministry of Jesus himself, a message that was not only affirmed in the faithful biblical experience and reflection upon Jesus, but further developed as this experience of the God proclaimed by Jesus became the starting point for a great deal of creative theological reflection and experience within the Palestinian Jewish-Christian communities, the Greek Jewish-Christian communities, and the Gentile Christian communities.

Early Christian reflection upon God's nature had a great deal of conceptual power for

people of diverse backgrounds because it obviously had a true and accurate ring about it. The God that people experienced in the presence of Jesus was none other than the God of the biblical Jewish faith, but the experience of this God was inextricably connected to the person of Jesus. That is, Jesus himself and his relationship to the divine reality with which he felt such connection and closeness to and called Father, was experienced as a fuller and more comprehensive self-declaration and self-demonstration of the divine nature and power.

At length, both the reality of the Father and the reality of Jesus became part of the God-experience for people. Jesus did not just convey new information about a reality called God, Jesus was understood as being an integral feature of the divine self-disclosure. Jesus appealed to, sought, prayed to, spoke about, and aided persons in the discernment of the reality of the Father whom he distinctively called *Abba*. The implied intimacy in these terms Jesus used when he invoked the divine reality, while coming out of the situation of the patriarchal structure of the Hebrew family, should not to be understood as connoting hierarchical monarchy, but rather must be appreciated as alluding to the parental concern and familial intimacy that characterizes similar words like mother, sister, or companion. Like all words they can hide as much as they reveal, and they should be understood not according to the typical practices of tribal patriarchy but rather in the intimate context and relationship with the divine that engaged Jesus.

Jesus' experience of God and his use of the word Father were actually the beginning of the end of patriarchy, as many feminist theologians have indicated.³ In the tradition we

³ See Elizabeth Shussler Fiorenza, *In Memory of Her: A Feminist Theological Construction of Christian Origins* (New York: Crossroad Press, 1983).

witness that God's care is often expressed in terms of motherly care and the Holy Spirit is expressed in a feminine noun in the New Testament texts. The words father and other words like divine power, divine wrath, divine judgment, which are problematic for some, need to be understood as being conditioned by the qualities of the divine nature, so they never have capricious or arbitrary connotations for God as they sadly so often do when describing the human reality. The word "Father", however, though it had metaphorical value for Jesus, seemed to be more than a symbol for Jesus. It actually served as Jesus' name for God. Jesus preached of the reign of God but the word "Father" seemed to be his preferred form of personal address for God.

Unlike us who call God *God*, Jesus called God *Father*. Nothing is lost if we call God "Mother" but we lose the personal connotations of emotional connectedness, warmth, and affection if we simply refer to God as "God" or as the "ultimate" or the "depths of being itself." The intimate emotional tone-feeling of the parental word encourages us to be as familiar with God as Jesus was. God language is symbolic and not inherent to the divine nature and therefore, is dispensable or interchangeable with other language. Although it takes more than any one word to understand the nature of God, because of Jesus' status as one of the persons of the trinitarian God, his use of this word is not equivalent to the words used on other reflective levels. The use of this word "Father" by Jesus brings home the personal substantiality and constitution of God. Also, speaking of God as the "Father" makes it easier to deal with the "Son" language of the tradition and makes clear not only the self-distinctions within the divine being and asserts the priority of the Father, but more importantly, family language facilitates language about the divine loving, the most

important aspect of the divine personhood and a particular emphasis for this pastoral theology. We ought to also note here that the ultimate goal for humanity is this same intimacy with the Father which Jesus experienced. The work of the third person of the Trinity is to bring about this intimate relationship. Paul particularly observes that through the active implementation of the Spirit, human beings are capacitated to call upon and pray to God as “Abba” or “Beloved Father” and experience what existence is like to live as children of God who are brought into a trusting relationship to God by the loving and saving presence of the Spirit.⁴ Like any metaphor, this one is not without its problems and limitations for some, yet still, its current usage and popularity permit its utilization.

Here is implied the reality that God is personal in that the infinite God relates in personal concreteness to created reality and creatures as a plurality of persons. The reality signified by the term “Father” is better understood by Jesus’ treatment of women and the totality of his teachings, not by the tragic history associated with patriarchy. Feminists have shown us that indeed there are no rational arguments for excluding women from any aspect of life in general or, specifically, life in the church, including the ecclesiastical ordained offices of clergy. Pannenberg postulates:

The idea that the image of God in the tradition has been shaped by human social conditions and that therefore, changes in human social conditions - as here the changed position of women---must necessarily result in changes in the image of God seems naively to presuppose that changes in religious conceptions are a function of social changes. That is to overlook the autonomy in the development of the great deities in the history of religion and is more or less involuntary confirmation of the basic conception of the modern atheistic criticism of religion that human ideas of God and the gods are mere *reflections* of human relationships, and that changes to them are reflections of changes on a human level. That is the

⁴ Cf. Gal. 4:6; Rom. 8:14-16.

element of assimilation to the spirit of secularism.⁵

Trinitarian language reflects the reality of relationality within God in the divine community, and is reviewed next. Additionally, it gives us an appreciation for the nobility and esteem of all human beings as children of God. The Father's work establishes this through the intimate, trusting relationship of the Spirit that are brought about as the Spirit brings the freeing and free love of the freely loving God to be and to mediate within human relationships.

The personhood and personality of God is, therefore, a direct consequence of the divine self-differentiation of the Godhead into the trinitarian persons, the self-distinction of the Godhead between the trinitarian persons, and the qualities or characteristics of relationship between these persons that are disclosed to us from the unified but unique actions of the persons. The qualities of personality and character classically associated with the self-disclosing nature of God attest that these qualities are perceived in the human experiencing of the acts of the triune plurality of persons within the Godhead.

This reality speaks of the social relations within God and how then this God affects human creatures by allowing them participation in the triune reality. The divine persons are alive and real in and through their relations to each other. It is important to understand that the Trinity is not simply related by origin. Jurgen Moltmann sees the trinitarian relations as beautifully expressed in John Damascene's conception of the eternal *perichoresis*, in which the persons are grasped as eternally related to each other through their perfect and involved loving of each other. The persons circulate eternally in loving

⁵ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Christianity in a Secularized World*, trans. John Bowden (New York: Crossroad Publishing, 1989), 54.

fellowship, maintaining distinction and unity in a relational exchange of energies that generates, sustains, and consummates the life process of the divine nature.⁶ This circulatory process between the divine persons fixes the divine nature and establishes what is actually knowable about God and the manner in which God works to bring about the divine image (*imago dei*) within persons, the goal of human personality.

This society or plurality of persons within God, therefore, is not essentially a relationship of origin nor properly understood as different modes of God, but distinct living realizations of separate centers of action. The divine being exists in a threefold awareness of richly textured kinship and connection that link and unite the persons of Father, Son, and Spirit in a complex eternal communion with one another.⁷ Each person is properly understood only in connection with its relations to the other two. It is this fact which separates a Christology from a Jesusology. An appreciation of the vibrancy of the person of Jesus is certainly enhanced with historical searches for his human identity, but unless one understands the complex nature of the network of associations that Jesus has as Son to the Father and as co-sender of the Spirit, one cannot grasp the historical reality of the manifestation of the self-demonstrating God. Each of the persons performs actions which bolster the functions of the other persons.

The New Testament is filled with the intricacy of the mutual relations between the persons comprising the Godhead. Yet, for all this complexity, it always remains true that

⁶ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Trinity and the Kingdom: The Doctrine of God*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press: 1993), 174-16.

⁷ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 319.

the three persons constitute the totality of God and that each personal actuality of God is the concrete reality of monotheism and idiom of the unity of the one living God. This is no abstract theorizing about transcendence, but rather sober reflection upon the nature of the self-demonstrating and self-declaring triune God.

We will now explicate the concrete nature of the divine reality and in following chapters indicate how that divine reality informs our understanding of the nature of humanity and an appropriate model for pastoral care.

The Character of the Personhood of the Triune God

Our reflection will now move toward explicating that within the divine nature which impinges directly upon the kind of pastoral caring conceived of in this program. We need to illustrate the qualities within the divine nature which directly affect the recognizable outcomes of the divine life upon human nature. The assumption of this theology is that sharing in the triune life of God, which we believe to be the essence of the Christian life, has specific, pronounced observable consequences. The biblical witness expresses it by affirming that authentic Christianity is recognizable by its results. Before we launch into a discussion of the character of God, we need to discuss briefly the idea of divine action and will. The program being constructed here attributes to God the environment and actual accomplishment of a purpose or objective. The human experience of the divine reality perceives within that triune reality something of an urge or pull or tug influencing, stimulating, or even more strongly, imploring or driving it toward some orientation or alignment that is just beyond its present status.

We noted that the most fundamental perception of deity is the apprehension of an external force or power which one perceives as an Other. Part of the experience of this

encountered Other is not only that that this Other impresses itself as having an actuality of its own, but that this power is subtly influencing the human subject to move or expand in a particular direction which feels more fulfilling and more expressive of the human being's felt destiny as a person. We are speaking here of our own personal experience of a benevolent will external to our own will, impressing upon us a subtlety of other ways of being-in-the-world that possess a fuller authenticity and humanity to them. This anthropological phenomena is fundamental to us. We interpret this as the divine being expanding the human personality at its growing edges.

This manifests itself variously as human wanderlust, restlessness, curiosity, the prevalent human hunger for discovery, travel, knowledge, wisdom, the dissatisfaction with the status quo, either of one's own society or one's own personality. It is an element of the divine being impressing upon the human being a desire to become "more." It is a rather mysterious desire and dynamic that, according to the biblical witness, has its source in the triune nature of God and traditionally has been called the divine will.

The similarity of the behaviors associated with mature Christian personhood across various Christian traditions are a strong indication that these impulses to become more human and authentic are a result of the divine tug and the divine guidance. The agreement about what constitutes sainthood or holiness among the various traditions of the Christian faith indicates the high probability that God's will is both discernible and attainable. Further, we ought to be able to predict what qualities of character will result from seriously involving ourselves in the life of the triune God. Finally, these qualities can be used for searching and directing personalities by the parish clergy.

In the biblical tradition, the breathtaking impression of the action of the Spirit is not a static mind but an active, dynamic, energetic, creative, life-giving power always moving and always propelling and inspiring whomever it encounters. The concept of action and will implies motion from one particular time-space locale or psychic locale to another.

Action and will in God, unlike in humans, where it often comes from want or need, seems to come primarily out of God's creatively, loving, self-giving nature. In any event the experience of the divine as an experience with Another possessing power and being has this impressive element of dynamism associated with it. This element of dynamism can be witnessed within the trinitarian relations of the persons of God, and also as it impresses itself upon the human subject, opening up for her or him possible occasions of creativity, authenticity, and humanity just beyond the current state of psychic affairs. This reality of a divine will as a power subtly influencing the human subject is often felt as something "there" compelling us, and yet, it often is experienced as something imprecise and unclear in reference to exactly what it is encouraging us to do. It is an experience which is often difficult to articulate and separate from other forms of psychic restlessness or urgings we experience.

In the historical course of theological reflection upon this urging, enhanced and precise formulations concerning the direction of this divine influence have become more lucid and comprehensible and therefore, can be utilized for the practice of pastoral care. The universal experience of this dynamic stimulus, although vague and mysterious at first both in terms of the history of the human race and the human individual can become at length, in the presence of a discerning community, more discriminating and eloquent. It is possible to speak of a divine game plan which neither robs the creatures of their

individuality nor of their freedom as moral, aesthetic, and spiritual agents, nor announces God as some cosmic despot. Pannenberg writes:

The goal of God's action in the world by the working of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit is twofold. It is first the creation of a creaturely reality that is distinct from God, and its consummation in encounter with the Creator. It is secondly the revelation of God's deity as the Creator of the world. This is in keeping with the fact that in all action something is effected in the world by the achievement of the chosen end, and the one who acts is known by the nature of the end and the ability or inability to achieve it.⁸

God acts according to the workings of the divine triune nature in the fellowship of the actions of the persons toward the world to achieve revealed, chosen ends. The divine trinitarian life is best conceived as a loving, dynamic force field uniting the three persons as proceeding from the Father, includes the revelation in the Son and further manifestation in the field of the Spirit. Deity is manifested distinctly in each of the persons who are bound together in a divine essence that draws individuals and communities to share its essence. At the same time, the action of the divine spiritual force field can be dodged or avoided to some extent. The purpose of God lies within the process of reality by virtue of the end which has been designated by God and proleptically revealed in the resurrection of Jesus. This designed end or future of God impinges persuasively, yet not irresistibly, upon the present moment of the developing creation and creature. The biblical term for this actual attainment or consummation of God's design is called the Kingdom of God and is the central feature of Jesus' person and work.

As a result, it would be difficult to comprehend the nature of God without a brief explication of the divine self-demonstration in the second person of the holy Trinity,

⁸ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 389.

Jesus, the Son. So we will now move to some crucial christological considerations.

The Person of Jesus and the Destiny of Persons

Reflection upon the person of Jesus is indispensable for our construction of a model of pastoral theology. Moltmann writes:

There is an inner criterion of all theology and of every church which claims to be Christian, and this claim goes far beyond all political, ideological, and psychological criticism from outside. It is the crucified Christ himself. When churches, theologians, and forms of belief appeal to him-which they must, if they are to be Christian-then they are appealing to the one who judges them most radically from lies and vanity, from the struggle for power and from fear.⁹

Nancey Murphy affirms christological explication as indispensable for the kind of project we construct here. We will need to demonstrate a fundamental theological anthropology based upon a christology which indicates why the particular discernment criteria we select for pastoral examination are relevant and accurate human manifestations of the divine life.¹⁰ There are primarily two issues for exploration for this part of our project. We wish to understand what Jesus demonstrates about God and we desire to understand what Jesus demonstrates about the nature and destiny of the human person. We will first consider the idea of his deity.

For Christians, the figure of Jesus has long been both the illuminating reality for the true nature of God and the true nature of the human person. Every Sunday morning, two of the three common lectionary passages for clergy reflection on the nature of human

⁹ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Crucified God: The Cross of Christ as the Foundation and Criticism of Theology*, trans. Robert Wilson and John Bowden (San Francisco: Harper & Row, 1974), 2.

¹⁰ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 162.

existence call for a preached interpretation upon the life and meaning of Jesus' person and work in what amounts to a re-presentation of the self-disclosure of God in the person of Jesus. Jesus' main goal was to help others to be able to approach God with the closeness and intimacy which he experienced. The impression of some early reflections about Jesus indicate that Jesus' life, work, death, and resurrection were deeply and uniquely connected to the Father from all eternity. Whereas the rest of humanity has to struggle a great deal to appropriate the divine being, and does so only after many long years of repentance and reformation, the biblical witness asserts that in the person of Jesus, the appropriation of the divine nature was accomplished and complete.

This could only mean that he shared both human and divine nature perfectly from the start of his life. The Father self-differentiated into a Son, and Christian tradition, in an attempt to describe this fact, asserted that divinity or eternal sonship became incarnate in Jesus' person. He was proclaimed Son of God in his constitution and therefore, from eternity in an exclusive manner that constituted his striking singularity. The New Testament titles and language suggest that Jesus embodied what trinitarian theology asserts, namely, a distinct person within the Godhead and a living realization of a particular concentration and focal point of divine action. Traditionally, this has been put forth as the Father begetting the Son or the Son proceeding from the Father as theology attempted to deal with the fact of the unique origin and nature of Jesus. It was this deity embodied in Jesus that was the basis for the extraordinary and creative nature of his human existence in which he actualized human beauty, character, and virtue to perfection, while maintaining a remarkable freedom from human sin. The christological titles,

particularly Son of God, were not used by Jesus but reflect the early church's theological reflection on Jesus' messiahship.¹¹ As for Jesus' messianic consciousness, it is difficult to say whether he had one. If he did, it was a messiahship quite unlike any thing that was expected of a coming Hebrew messiah. It would seem to be the case that only the resurrection of Jesus allowed the post-Easter church to begin the long process of thoughtful consideration of his theological importance and the development of a Christology which finally resulted in a very sophisticated trinitarian theology. This speculation resulted in the church concluding that Jesus was and is the second person of the holy Trinity, one of the component persons of the social plurality constituting the Godhead.

The history of the world is also the history of God's continuing self-demonstration. This self-demonstration goes hand in hand with human theological reflection upon it. It continues to be true that the church to this day continues for many substantial reasons to maintain its affirmation that Jesus is not simply one special human being or super-human being, but that he shares in the deity of God. Jesus' deity flows from his relationship with God whom he called the personal name and understood as Father. Jesus' whole identity and existence was radically wrapped up with the theme of the immediate looming reality of the divine presence, which was making itself felt uniquely in his person and would only be flawlessly disclosed in the future and a pragmatic theological sensibility and appreciation of existence or theological being-in-the-world that this already-but-not-yet divine presence recommended and signaled. Jesus lived his life in

¹¹ E. P. Sanders, *The Historical Figure of Jesus* (London: Penguin Books, 1993).

sensitive openness, responsiveness, and vulnerability to the divine reality he called Father, to whose Spirit he was remarkably attuned and by whose Spirit he acclaimed himself to be encouraged and energized. The church came to proclaim that Jesus was not only in a certain type of cognitive compliance with God but that God was actually bestowing the extravagantly loving, divine self and negotiating a novel relationship with all humanity through Jesus' person, work, and resurrection, which was a fulfillment of the promises to Israel and through Israel to the whole world.

The content of Jesus' preaching was not himself nor his divinity, it was simply the nearness of the One he called the Father, the loving and gracious qualities of the Father, how the Father was inviting the entire human race into a new, universal, salvific fellowship with the Father, and how human existence would be pervaded, if it responded in trusting faith to this divine overture, by the creative Spirit of God in the concrete reality of an infinite, vitalizing field of loving power. The consequence of responding to this divine approach would be the completion by grace of the human creature, and the fulfillment of human identity and destiny which the Creator Father had begun in the process of nature.

The content of Jesus message was not always warmly received. This content was perceived by various individuals and influential groups of people as religiously, socially, and politically incorrect. The ramifications of Jesus' teaching meant that the structures of power within society were called into question. Powerful people found Jesus corrupt, blasphemous, and seditious, and therefore, very threatening to the status quo. They concluded that the only way to stop the perceived community upheaval that would inevitably result from his message was to execute him, which they ultimately did, according to the Roman capital law procedure of flogging and crucifixion.

The contradiction and incongruity of the content of Jesus' message and the means of his death as a dissident insurrectionist cannot be stressed enough. The death of Jesus was not just an accident caused by some muddled and slightly daft overly zealous public defenders. He was executed because those involved in his murder understood exactly what he meant and what the implications of his message were. If that is true, and if it was also true that God was drawing close to humanity in the person of Jesus as Jesus asserted, then the theological conclusion can only be that the crucifixion of Jesus was the result of the appearance of God in him. Of course, as Jesus was laid into his tomb, no such conclusion could have been credibly reached. The disparity implied between Jesus' message and his dishonorable and disgraceful end could only be resolved by another final act of the Father, who was implicated in everything Jesus had said and done. This event was the resurrection of Jesus from the dead. The discrepancy between the manner in which Jesus' life came to an end and his claim that the finger of God had come upon people in his life and ministry was resolved only by the resurrection of the Crucified.

The resurrection of Jesus from the dead, which was established and confirmed by numerous appearances which took place over a span of time to individuals and groups of people who were his followers, is at the core of the New Testament witness and is the foundational event of the first Christian communities. The first followers of Jesus understood that it was his resurrection from the dead that made him more than a martyr or example of authentic piety. They grasped that the resurrection of Jesus was the bedrock and essence of Christian belief and that the event of the resurrection was inseparable from the earthly mission and ministry of Jesus, and inseparable also from his demise, rejection,

and crucifixion as well. If the crucifixion of Jesus signified the rejection of Jesus as an authentic self-demonstration of the Father's loving, gracious power which was dawning in the person of Jesus and which Jesus announced as the core of everything he lived and taught, then the resurrection was, as an action of the same Father, a rejection and overruling of that rejection by those whose dealings lead to his death. But this resurrection was not only the defeat of Jesus' death and, therefore, death itself, as the earliest church properly understood. This resurrection event had a retroactive aspect to it and confirmed and validated the entire message of Jesus concerning God's nearing self-disclosure in Jesus.

The Easter event had the effect of uncovering the meaning and reality of the life and death of Jesus, his connection to God, and the understanding that in him was an authentic realization of a personhood of God, namely, the Son in his perichoretic communal tie to the Father in the power of the Spirit. While the eschatological hopes of Israel were diverse, and the renderings of Jesus' resurrection likewise found variegated expression within the New Testament communities, nevertheless, an environment for understanding such a singular event was provided by the theology of the Jewish people.

The validation of Jesus' message was not the only meaning of his resurrection. The resurrection of Jesus was also understood by the early church to be a parable for the destiny of the human race. While with Pannenberg we affirm the historical facticity of the resurrection of Jesus, even though there will still continue to be debate about its facticity, we appreciate the often symbolic nature of resurrection language used in the biblical tradition. The record of the resurrection appearances in the gospels and in the Pauline

correspondence as they have come to us also decisively affirm the historical facticity of Jesus' resurrection. The remainder of resurrection language in the biblical witness serves a metaphorical purpose in talking about how this eschatological event occurring in history offers a new, more authentic kind of human existence in this life and a similar destiny for humanity to that of Jesus, in the raising up of all into a new and imperishable life. The resurrection and the theological reflection upon that event by the early church led to the conclusion that Jesus was a person within the Godhead. The implication of his life in light of the Easter-event urged an interpretation that he was a divine locution. Jesus' relationship to God was expressed eventually in terms of his being a distinct person in the plurality of persons in God. He was seen ultimately as eternally existent and related to the Father in the divine perichoresis.

In that relationship, one observes Jesus living with a sense of self-distinctiveness from other persons and God, but expressive of a being-in-the-world characterized by solidarity for others, and in creative compliance, yielding his personality openly and finding the focal point of his identity in the One he called Father. All the early christological titles used in the biblical witness like Kyrios (Lord), Servant, Priest, Prophet, Messiah, and Savior were fundamentally titles connected with Jewish apocalypticism and faded in importance to the concept of Jesus as Son in human nature and divine nature and ultimately, as second person of the Trinity. The importance of this development cannot be overestimated. It allowed Jesus to be understood, not only as a locale of the divine self-disclosure in his divine nature, but further, in his human nature, he came to be interpreted as expressive of the destiny of the human creature whose fulfillment lies in Jesus, that is, in sonship or

daughtership to the divine, who unites the divine nature with the human nature in an incarnation which grants us strength and grace through the power of the Spirit to live in this same creative compliance with God.¹²

The manner in which Jesus was in the world is the manner in which God is realized in the world today. God lives in the nexus of a tri-unity. The personhood of God is realized in the perichoresis of the Father, Son, and Holy Spirit and the action of the divine threefold subjectivity establishes the manner in which the process of God's self-demonstration is concretely actualized in history. Pannenberg posits:

It is also true that their deity is the result of this process. Yet the action of the trinitarian persons is not oriented to themselves but to the other persons. In the economy of salvation, the same is true of the sending of the Son by the Father, of the Son's obedience to the Father, and of the glorifying of the Father and the Son by the Spirit. Hence the self-actualizing of the one God is one of reciprocity in the relations of the persons and the result of their mutual self-giving to one another.¹³

The nature of God is understood as the relationship within the subjectivity of the divine threefoldness. God's reality in the world is seen in the trinitarian concretions through which God actualizes the divine being. The nature and destiny of the human creature is acceptance of the divine invitation to a creative and transformative participation in a sharing of this trinitarian life in which God realizes deity without coercion or domination and with respect for the autonomous individuality of the creature.

The Person of the Holy Spirit: An All-Embracing Field of Force

Humanity is the creation of the one God who exists and self-actualizes in the perichoresis of a threefold plurality of persons. We need to assess in what employment the

¹² Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2: 234 ff.

¹³ Ibid., 2: 394.

this fellowship. We want to do this particularly with regard to actualizing the authentic personhood of individuals.

Michael Welker posits that God's Spirit constitutes a power rich in reality and vitality that is experienced in various human experiences, but particularly in experiences of threat and endangerment, or incidents that we have labeled opposing edge experiences.¹⁴

The biblical name for the human perception of this power as Spirit conjures up images of properties associated with it, such as energy, vitality, vigor, and being. Often, Spirit is associated with the motion involved with wind, breath, and inspiration and seems to indicate a creative dynamic that orders the chaos and brings life to both animal and human creatures. The concept of Spirit as field of force enables us to conceive of God as infinite, loving, and a dynamic field of power.¹⁵ God is a dynamic force field who is structured in trinitarian fashion. Each of the persons in the plurality of persons within the divine field is one personal concretion or location of divine actuality. Pannenberg posits that the Holy Spirit as the active essence of God in creation would possess the quality of active and influential field occasion and event.¹⁶ This field would have to possess certain qualities that are associated with in scripture, tradition and experience. And coherent with these sources.

The Holy Spirit as a personal concretion of the divine field of force relates in a creative fashion to the phenomena and creatures that exist within the field. In the way all

¹⁴ Welker, *God the Spirit*, x.

¹⁵ Pannenberg, *Toward a Theology of Nature*, 130-32.

¹⁶ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 82-86.

creative fashion to the phenomena and creatures that exist within the field. In the way all things are effected by gravity that are in gravity's field, so all things within the field of the Holy Spirit can come under its influence as well. However, the field of the Spirit can be resisted, and there is ample reason to believe that the creature can influence the divine field of the Spirit. Even though the creatures could never take supremacy over it, the divine field can subtly adjust itself to the conditions of the creatures and give them room to affect the field configuration of the Spirit's activity.

The Spirit as an operative field creates and encounters the human creature in its working in space-time. We posit that nature is not a closed system but an open field of the divine Holy Spirit that is experienced by the human creature. So we can talk of the work of the Spirit in creation and, particularly, the action of the Spirit upon the human subject who is open to it. The Spirit has been associated both with the preservation of the order of things and also with the appearance of novel forms of entities. Here we are not as concerned with the actions of the Spirit in creation and nature as we are in the nature and destiny of the human being. But before we discuss the operation of the Spirit upon the human subject and whether openness to the effects of the Spirit is a basic feature of authentic humanity, a subject which will concern us in the next chapter, we need briefly to discuss the salient concepts concerning the divine attributes.

Basic Nature and Capabilities of the Trinitarian God

This project tracks on the assumption that the operation of God upon the soul or essence of the human subject should produce observable proclivities or inclinations. Obviously the effect that the divine field of force exerts upon the human personality will

produce in the human subject the same leanings as those within the divine field of force, since God's action precisely reflects God's nature. This character and nature of God comes to us through the self-demonstration of God, in whom we encounter the activity and operation of God's power.

God encounters us in the divine distinctness as Other than us. In this experience of otherness, we perceive the characteristics or attributes of this otherness. This distinctness allows us to perceive God adequately and correctly, particularly when we commune within a spiritual society whose primary function is the perception and understanding of this divine otherness. The question concerning the essence of the divine is answered by discriminating and closely inspecting the complex field of divine working. When we accurately perceive God, we are not projecting our own human qualities upon God nor crudely anthropomorphizing, we are ascribing to God those characteristics and attributes that reflect the divine essence and reality. While God is simple and a unity in essence and action, we are able to perceive distinctions within God because of our refined sensibility, just as we are able to distinguish differences with people, music, or other actualities.

These differences in God are probably more integrated within the divine being than within the human being, but the fact is we can perceive and discuss differences within the constitution of the trinitarian plurality. Part of the issue of deity is that deity is always understood as having the power to prove its reality in a relatively clear manner due to the limitations of the human subject and human perceptive apparatus, the tendency to project and anthropomorphize and the intricate task of discerning the subtle impulses of the divine field of force. While we need to watch for these pitfalls when talking about the actions of

the divine field of force, our perception of understanding God by considering God's actions and choice of a goal, and the way God approaches this goal, are the most appropriate manner in which to reach conclusions concerning of the divine attributes as well as the qualities of personhood that the Spirit is generating within the human person who is open to this field of force. If we can talk about a divine design and direction, then it is inevitable that the God who possess such will and activity will have conspicuous qualities as well. The design and direction of the actualization of any goal reflects the activity and nature of the one who selects the design and whose efforts are shaped by the attempt to accomplish the chosen objective. Therefore, God can be understood by appreciating the goal for humanity which God has envisioned and the means by which the trinitarian God in the communal perichoresis of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit endeavors to realize this goal.

The Divine Field of Force as Holy Spirit

There has to be some manner of adequately perceiving a particular experience with the divine field. If we start with the notion of love, the problem for distinguishing the God within is difficult since we experience many forms of love in our interiority. The church long ago understood this fact and for this reason decided upon the name "Holy" Spirit to signal a primary and indispensable quality in the experience of the divine field.

God's holiness has an element of awe-ful-ness in which the person experiencing it has the feeling of being in the presence of the Creator and its attendant emotions of "creature feeling" at the immensity of the divine being and strength.¹⁷ God's holiness has a

¹⁷ Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, chap. 1.

component of overpoweringness that the tradition calls the divine majesty. This particular element is associated with wrath and judgment of God and finds expression in the prescribing of times and places for worship and the cultic setting. This element of overpoweringness also leads to the formation of holiness codes and practices and moral laws. The holiness of God seems to draw people into a desire for holiness themselves. While people fear and tremble before the holiness and purity of God, perhaps because of their perceived unholiness and impurity, they also are strongly attracted to it, and often understand this attraction as an invitation into a more elevated, authentic, human way of being-in-the-world. The majestic beauty of God's holiness often conjures feelings of dread or fear or quite often strange, mysterious or uncanny feelings in which one inwardly trembles and quakes in mystical awe before the divine majesty. Holiness is the manner in which God demonstrates and confirms the divine field and conveys to the human individual the divine desire to perfect the human soul and preserve and prepare it for eternal life and fellowship within the infinite divine field. Thus the holiness of God stands in opposition to the profane world and yet at the same time supports and assists the profane world by effecting a holy communion with the triune God.

God does not simply contest human sin but indeed pledges to rescue human beings from their folly and error, and so it is God's holiness that becomes Israel's hope and hope for salvation. In fact, Israel's entire identity and destiny was to participate in the divine holiness which called for its separation and turning from the profane. The whole purpose of God coming to Israel was to allow them to participate in his holiness and through them to elect the entire world for fellowship and communion with God.

With the New Testament, the holiness of God disturbs and interrupts the world in the

person of Jesus Christ who stipulates and confers it. Christ's holiness sets in motion the typical human responses that we see to God's holiness in the Old Testament, namely, a compelling religious-mystical awe, which conveyed a divine otherness. In his holiness, Jesus seemed to invade the world from another sphere or divine realm and entered the world of men and women, the profane world and touched it, understood it, and pierced it, desiring to do what God would also do, and that was to prompt it toward holiness.

It was his holiness that made him a threat to the status quo, brought the charges of treason and blasphemy against him, and resulted in his crucifixion. It was his resurrection which vindicated both his and God's holiness.

The third person in the plurality of God is the Holy Spirit. Holiness is the dynamic work and will of the Spirit because it is the Spirit of the holy God. The Spirit as the divine field of force that influences human persons has the task of endowing us as creatures with the divine, holy image. The Holy Spirit is a Spirit of power which creates the kind of holiness in humans that already exists in God. This image of God was already perfected in the person of Jesus the Son. God as Holy Spirit enabled God's holy otherness to manifest in Jesus the image of a divinized humanity and its attendant and characteristic righteousness, love, beauty, incorruptibility, and immortality. The Spirit's work is to prepare humanity for the destiny of Jesus in its mysterious, holy, divine likeness. As the true field of force of the divine, the Holy Spirit creates a similarity that does not exist naturally between God and humans.

Obviously, if humans were made already as they are meant to be, and fashioned in the divine image there would be little cause for awe and shuddering. The shuddering points

the human in the right direction, toward the fulfillment of being created into a likeness of God's being, and capable, finally, of holiness and immortality.

The Spirit as the Spirit of God sanctifies the human creatures by creating a fellowship with God that rises above and beyond their fleeting, ephemeral existence. Since human existence is existence in community, the Spirit establishes communities of the Spirit whose existence is a symbolic anticipation of the sphere where God will be all in all, called the Kingdom of God in the teachings of Jesus. Saint Paul, in his epistles, tags the people who identify with this community *oi ayioi*, the holy ones or the saints. The central reality of God is holiness and God, having created creatures, in an energetic and vital inclination toward them and for them grants the creatures, through the field of the Holy Spirit, the ability to participate and engage in the divine life. The holiness of God finds its essential expression in the power of divine love.

The Holy Love of God and the Trinity

In creating free human creatures in distinction from the divine being, God has allowed the divine field to be affected by entities other than the divine being. God limits the divine influence in creating space for others, allows the divine field to be affected by these others and allows these others to affect each other in complex ways. Jesus' work was contingent upon the openness of those whom he encountered and, in many places, the gospels reminds us he did little or nothing. Likewise, Paul could write about frustrating the Spirit. Any argument that advances trinitarian assertions needs to include and determine the kind of action expressive of the God who acts.

The central content of the action of the divine field of force is attested consistently throughout the New Testament as agapic love as it is demonstrated in the concrete event-

horizon of Jesus Christ and his relation to the Father as Son, in the power of the Holy Spirit and, with them, toward others. The agapic, divine love makes up the essential and most significant substance of the history of Jesus. Jesus taught and spoke of the divine love of God, as the Father who invested the divine self utterly into passionate choice and desire for humanity, and therefore, into tangible being for humanity and in fellowship with humanity. Jesus' approach and appeal was the unchanging and determined message of God's agapic love.

Jesus believed himself called by the Father to proclaim precisely this reality to everyone and, particularly, to those at the margins of acceptable society. Especially in his parables we see this attestation to God's loving incursion. We also see the same quite strikingly in Jesus' energetic and enterprising seeking out, finding, inviting, and accepting for table fellowship the lost and creating a new reality of solidarity among and for them. Jesus not only preached this message as a matter-of-course disposition of the Father, he actually created this fellowship as a social reality lived in the concrete actuality of a reconciling new community of inclusiveness. Jesus preached the at-handness of the future Father who now was breaking into the profane, mundane reality of the human un-world, and inviting and challenging people to the creation of a more authentic, holy, human reality where the quality of human loving would become the quality of God's loving.

The human experience of God in the New Testament is that self-giving love is the very essence of God and not a subsidiary attribute. As such, the divine love plays out within the community of the trinitarian persons in their love, in that one person loves the other two and each consummates the nature of love by finding and loving the others. The

trinitarian love of the divine field plays out beyond the reciprocal relations and activities between the three persons in the trinitarian movement toward persons. This grants human personalities the mark of divine love for other humans that characterizes the trinitarian life of God, the original and complete configuration of loving fellowship and the ontological foundation for human loving. Although the trinitarian relationships are quite elaborate and a thorough explication of them goes beyond the scope of this thesis, we briefly suggest the following as the basic form of their lively mutuality.

The Father loves by creating the Son, loving the Son, and communing with the Son. The Son loves the Father by receiving his existence from the Father and living in intimacy with the Father, who has given him existence and given existence to everything that is and by fulfilling his role as Son of the Father in fellowship with the Father as open disclosure concerning the nature of authentic deity and the nature of authentically realized humanity. The Son gratefully and gracefully receives his life and essence from the Father and trusts completely in the goodness of the Father by living in openness to the presence and future of the Father, by allowing the Father, through the field of the Spirit, to have an efficacious, holy impact upon the life of the Son. The result of this holy life has an effect upon the world, which manifests an authentically human way of being-in-the-world. The Spirit as a dynamic, loving field unites the Father and Son in mutuality and unity, while each maintains its distinction. The Spirit continues the influence of the Son in the divine field of force, and the Son serves the Spirit by clarifying both the nature of the Father and also by indicating the bearing or heading of the Spirit as the Spirit seeks to continue the sanctification of the human world, uniting human with human in the fellowship of the divine trinitarian life and ultimately granting human existence a place in the field of God's

eternity.

While each of the persons represent the divine life in a certain way, one cannot appreciate the divine field without understanding the nature, content, and relations of the trinitarian persons. The persons are the threefold concretions of the total divine field. In terms of understanding God's love for human beings, the persons strive to involve the human beings in the fellowship of the trinitarian life. Each person of the Trinity lives for the other persons in relation to the other persons and also relates to human individuals by drawing them into the fellowship of Father, Son, and Holy Spirit in the existence of a community of faith. It is the relationship of the Trinity to human individuals that we normally speak of as the constitution of the divine loving.

The aspects of this loving or the forms of loving which the Spirit takes, the biblical witness nuances as the divine forgiveness, goodness, faithfulness, wisdom, patience, graciousness, truthfulness, righteousness, mercy, and peace. These components of the divine loving also play out in the relations between human and human, when humans open themselves up to the trinitarian life of God.

In regard to any discussion upon the nature of human authenticity and selfhood, we understand human personhood only in light of the trinitarian perichoretic mutuality and the human personality being drawn into and partaking of this triune life. It is not enough to say humans exist in and for relation, but rather that human beings exist in and for relations with the triune God and that this trinitarian life creates a space, a love, and a freedom that makes authentic human relations possible. Theological anthropology is by its nature trinitarian and comes forth based upon the concept of the persons in the Trinity and their

relations to each other. The next chapter develops the nature of an anthropology based upon insights from the nature of God as interrelated trinitarian persons.

CHAPTER 5

A Theological Understanding of the Human Self: Appropriation of Divine Likeness

A Christian Self-Understanding

The issue for us as we begin the development of an anthropology for our particular model for pastoral theology and care is grasping the fundamental theological nature and reality of the human personality. This can be used to inform pastoral intervention.

Ludwig Wittgenstein attempted to define language by first describing games, comparing language games (*Sprachspiel*) to chess (*Schachspiel*). He pointed out that in association with an examination of language, as among games of all sorts, there are “family resemblances” in which:

we see a complicated network of similarities overlapping and criss-crossing: sometimes overall similarities, sometimes similarities of detail.¹

Theological anthropologies of various schools of theology have what Wittgenstein calls family resemblances. Psychological anthropologies of various systems also possess familial similarities. For the reason that the theologians and psychologists are both constructing anthropology and are concerned with the most accurate description about the reality of human nature, one can easily make a case that they are both playing a different language game (various schools) within the same family (anthropology). Due to the fact that the subject matter of theology and psychology is somewhat divergent, with divergent assumptions about the nature of human reality and the actuality of the divine, one can readily argue that they are not only different games but have little family resemblance.

¹ Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. Anscombe, 3rd ed. (New York: Macmillan, 1958), 32.

Religious humanity has a psychological makeup and can utilize psychological theory and method in a limited fashion. Numerous schools of psychology possess no conception of the reality of the divine.² This is the case either because they do not believe it to be the subject of their enterprise or possibly because those schools do not give credence to the existent reality of God or the human ability to experience, know, and discern God and be influenced by God.

The conclusions we reach about human nature and what constitutes authentic and truly humanized people are based upon what we will note about the religious nature of humanity and not the symptoms that impair normal human functioning in relationships or job performance, a common theme of counseling and counseling theories. Emotional symptoms can frustrate and delay the appropriation of the divine destiny for humanity, and if the pastor encounters such deep emotional wounds, these certainly need to be addressed either directly or through an appropriate referral. The current model does not directly address extensive emotional reparation through the addressing and reparation of deep emotional trauma but rather is something more in line with classical spiritual formation. Spiritual formation here means that the work of the pastor in caring focuses upon the actions and discernment of the divine field of Spirit.

We are positing a human religious endowment which is built upon the claim that the religious disposition in the human being and the human longing for transcendent mysteries and actualities is a quintessential component of human nature. We affirm that religion is an essential part of humanity, and that it is hard to visualize that there can be a

² See Kung, *Freud and the Problem of God*.

fully abundant and undiminished human life without it.³ Relationship to the trinitarian God constitutes the fundamental truth about human identity.

In speaking about a religious disposition we are not speaking of such in the manner of the human religious dimensionists, as we call them, like Paul Tillich,⁴ Wilfred C. Smith⁵ or James Fowler.⁶ These authors prefer to define religious experience as ultimate meaning and concern. Typically, they prefer the term faith to religion or theology. They interpret the term faith as any type of subjective commitment, attitude, or philosophical stance which is a universal component in all humans.

In the sphere of psychology, the humanist Abraham Maslow would concur with this portrayal of religion. Religion to Maslow is characterized by values and extraordinary, uncommon “peak” experiences, often labeled as transcendent or mystical by the lone individual quite in tune with these inner occasions and their profoundly ecstatic and transforming nature.⁷ In fact, he believes organized religion to be the attempt by peakers to transmit the interior wealth of their experience to non-peakers. But he argues these experiences are non-theistic even though they are eminently valuable. Erich Fromm,

³ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1:155-58.

⁴ Paul Tillich, *Systematic Theology*, 1:11-15.

⁵ Wilfred C. Smith, *The Meaning and End of Religion*:

⁶ Fowler, *Stages of Faith*. The Psychology of Human Development and the Quest for Meaning. (San Francisco: Harper and Row, 1981).

⁷ Maslow, *Religions, Values, and Peak-Experiences*, 19-26.

another humanistic psychologist, is also quite affirming of the ultimate theological values of love, freedom, and self-realization within the western religious tradition. Like Maslow, he also excises all theistic reference in his approach to understanding the nature of humanity and human religion.⁸

David Tracy, a Roman Catholic theologian, also postulates a religious dimension or horizon to all human experience. Tracy defines religious experience as unusual events in human experience which he labels limit-situations. He explains limit-situations as moments of life which possess a qualitative difference from ordinary experience because one is confronted either with contradiction, as in negating occasions with one's own human finitude found in situations of loss, death, disease, anxiety, despair, guilt, or one is validated positively by a life-affirming experience of ecstasy, vivacious joy, beauty, creativity, love, and reassurance. These limit-situations, according to Tracy, are the universal religious dimension of human life. They disclose a dimension to life which is unavailable at normal, mundane moments.

Further, every aspect of human life and culture has a religious dimension including the everyday world, the scientific and artistic world, and moral experience, inasmuch as one can discover a dimension in these worlds that conveys deep, ultimate meaning about human existence. Tracy notes that Christian language and theistic language in general is appropriately understood as a specific kind of limit-language. He defines faith as the ability to discover and commit to the authentic human values and meanings disclosed by the religious dimension of human experience and what he calls the "powerful symbolism

⁸ Erich Fromm, *Psychoanalysis and Religion* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1950), 48-51.

of the value of love disclosed as the central purpose of human existence.”⁹

We affirm Tracy’s understanding of this essential dynamic in creative human transformation. We will nuance it a bit differently by developing it in the tradition of spiritual formation and guidance. We move now to a discussion of that that development.

The Dignity and Destiny of Persons: Divine Congruity

The New Testament message of the gospel of Jesus Christ speaks in a remarkably calm, clear, and straightforward manner that the identity, integrity, dignity, and destiny of the human being was conceived of by the creating God, the divine trinitarian field of agapic power, and can be carried through and accomplished most authentically in relation to this Creator. Christians assert that a primary factor in the construction of authenticity is fellowship with this Creator, and that God is a catalyst for authenticity. The human personality cannot be adequately fathomed without understanding its contingency upon God. The human self is by constitution related to and reliant upon this Creator who determines everything and upholds everything at every moment. Human beings are creatures, but they are also creatures whose selfhood is incomplete, never quite achieved, and always just beyond its present status. Human selfhood is grounded in a the divine reality and a future destiny which transcends its seemingly fixed, unchanging actuality.¹⁰

The human self is properly understood as being always summoned by God to exceed itself and its present state, in a dynamic which the biblical testimony suggests with

⁹ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 105-09.

¹⁰ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 104.

terms like conversion, repentance, and sanctification. The human personality finds its fulfillment and destiny in creative transformation in relation to God as source and goal.

The earliest biblical reflection upon the intention of God in creating humanity is the startling statement in Genesis 1:26 about the divine aspiration for humanity being expressed in terms of congruity, continuity, resemblance, or likeness to God.

The concept of the divine likeness has dual meanings. In the statement from Genesis, the idea of divine likeness seems to point to a quality that relates commonly to all humanity by virtue of its common origin in creation by God. That is to say, all humanity reflects something of God's deity by virtue of God being the one and only Creator and putting something of deity into the creation of human beings, particularly as humanity differs from God's other creatures in the garden.

By the time of the New Testament, the notion of divine image or congruence suggests that this resemblance is more related to human destiny and mediated to us from the Father through the Son in the power of the Spirit. In the Old Testament sense, divine congruence seems to be something of an inherent status. By the time of the New Testament, in light of a rethinking of anthropology which the resurrection of Jesus forced upon the early Christian community, divine congruence or likeness seemed to take on a new status involving the willing participation of the creature. Paul's contrast between the First Adam (original humanity in Genesis) and the Second Adam (Jesus Christ) appears to make the point that human destiny as God's creatures is only brought to realization through the performance of the second and third persons of the Trinity. The idea of the image of God was not accurately or completely fathomed until it became visible in its

realization in the proclaimed authentic humanity of Jesus.

The Christian understanding of divine congruence is therefore, the clarification and demonstration of the intrinsic and consummate destiny of humanity created and directed towards the divine likeness. The meaning of the divine likeness in Genesis is scarcely developed in the original texts and seems to indicate the authority and responsibility of human rule over creation or possibly human attributes of morality, spirit, self-awareness, and thought. In the person of Jesus Christ, Paul contended God had, in fact, made a remarkably clear self-disclosure about the divine intention for humanity. Paul referred to Jesus as the Second Adam, evidently inferring the divine conception of a fresh, imaginative, novel re-beginning of, for, and including humanity.

The paramount idea in this was that humanity was initially created with connection and disposition toward God, and that human identity was primarily based upon this universal orientation and procured its identity from this reality. But the affiliation and orientation was neither particularly conclusive nor efficacious. Another way one might say this is that God did not accomplish or finish humanity at the origin of human life but wanted to achieve this through a progressive, incremental course with the creatures who sprang from the divine creativity.

If humanity is destined to be forged into the image of God, this indicates that there is something within the human personality that is incomplete and needs to be brought to realization in order that human beings resemble God, the Father of Jesus Christ, who in the Son has shown us our final destination in the process of our historical existence and movement. The human self has a destiny which involves appropriating a similarity to Jesus which it does not possess at birth. The human self is a self which needs the gifted exertion

of God in willing cooperation with each human individual to be complete.

Human destiny disclosed in Jesus is first and foremost the overcoming of sin and death, as the biblical witness attests. In the resurrection of Jesus, the image of God which was demonstrated was that Jesus was transformed into the eternity of God in an original, perfected, and incorruptible form. Jesus was made, by an act of God, to participate in the eternal life of God and thus was transformed into God's eternal image. In Jesus we see the image of God in a full expression. It is something profoundly beautiful as was hinted at in the Old Testament texts about divine likeness. The image of God can only be brought about by God who grants humans a real share in the deity of the divine being. This is an act of pure, loving power and grace on the part of God, since no human can even dream to attain such a destiny by human strength alone.

One of the ideas behind the divine likeness as a goal for humanity is the idea of fellowship with God which cannot be broken by death or any other earthly power. God creates us for fellowship with the divine trinitarian community. If the destiny of Jesus is the destiny of humanity, then humans also will have to be accommodated by God to God's eternity as well. In this way, humanity will be perfectly transformed into the divine image. Human existence then will be eternally congruent with divine existence in its future and the future of God.

The idea of divine likeness, however, is not limited to that transformed state of eternal life where ~~God makes room for humans in the eternal field of force~~. For the concern of this pastoral theology and the questions raised concerning the life of authentic Christian personhood, the divine likeness begins to take shape already in the present as the person

who is open to fellowship with God begins to participate in this holy realm of God through the influence of the Spirit's field of force. The message of Jesus was that God was invading this world from another world and that there were visible, empirical signs of this divine incursion recognizable in the present indicating God's creative hand. Creation in God's image also means being currently oriented and disposed toward fellowship with God.

Human destiny is seen not only in Jesus' resurrection but also in Jesus' earthly life. As the resurrected One, Jesus confirms and anticipates a universal human resurrection. As the Holy One who lived an earthly life, Jesus indicates the manner in which the purpose of God begins to work itself out in human life. Because of this, we can recognize signs of the divine power as the biblical witness and the traditions of spirituality indicate. Further, the beginning and development of fellowship with God has an effect upon the individual which makes deeper fellowship possible. This fellowship results in manifestations of typically Christian postures, dispositions, and virtues which correspond to conceptions of authentic human being-in-the-world.

We want to elaborate a model that affords signposts in the journey toward God and authentic human selfhood.

Self-Postures and Authentic Selfhood

Diverse theological motifs produce diverse understandings of the human self. One of these motifs is a particularly Lenten expression. It is the idea of self-denial. It certainly is one possible Christian self-understanding. There is always the need for the human self to suppress many natural appetites and desires and to learn how to channel these into socially acceptable since enculturation is an important aspect of self-functioning.

Self-denial ought to constitute some aspect of self-identity. The problem with self-denial alone as a self concept is that its negativity could develop into a theological and anthropological pessimism that might lead ultimately to a self-alienating and self-despairing condition. The things humans desire are often not the things they need, nor are they the things that bring the good of either the individual or the whole community. This means some form of self-denial is necessary for life to continue. Freud's notion that civilization and refined art and culture developed from basic sublimated survival needs and the ability to defer gratification is important to remember in this discussion.¹¹ But self-denial can introduce humans to non-identity, if one is denying something that defines sound self-aspects. A personal self-consciousness of sinfulness and false guilt or shame is not the most appropriate manner in which to establish true human identity. If one sets out with the idea of original sin or the fallenness of humanity, then authenticity begins in negation of identity and can bring us to self-alienation. Thus, in the search for the most appropriate signification of authentic human selfhood, we do not desire to create and postulate a self-model by beginning with establishing moral or penitential self-models typical of the law and gospel dialectical theme or exclusively penitential models of self.¹²

Self-denial of sin is an important aspect of our particular pastoral theology. But we would explicate it and embody it by today's hermeneutic, typical of the gospel spirit of liberation theology, and not primarily as the transgression of rigid moral norms or absolute divine commandments. More readily, sin might serve as the omission to develop an

¹¹ See Sigmund Freud. *The Ego and the Id* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1960).

¹² Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality*, 29-34.

identity in the trinitarian life of God.

The concept of sin is an unknowingness or an unwillingness to comprehend oneself as being created by God for fellowship with God and with others in God. This would entail an ensuing failure to both appreciate and appropriate the trinitarian life of God.

Conversion is useful in our model, but not so much conversion from one moral stance or lack thereof to another moral stance, although that might be the result of conversion.

Rather, conversion might indicate a failure to join God in one's creative transformation.

Any understanding of sin as individual and perhaps isolated sinful acts may be apt in some circumstances. However, sin as sinful act or acts has been rendered difficult within the current milieu. This milieu includes the relativising of norms and ethics, and therefore, vast disagreement on what specifically constitutes an individual sinful act within and between individuals and communities of faith. The result is a wise and compassionate reluctance to pronounce or condemn certain acts as immoral. Often the real cause of so-called sins are not within personal human will but in psychological, cultural, or sociological factors. This problem is further exacerbated with the reality that a great deal of what passes for moral norms is simply the conventional, and that this convention is strongly and selectively biased by class, gender, sexual, racial, and political prejudice or preference.

The theological concept of original sin points us to the reality of human non-identity. Humans, we assert, are not born with an identity, but must procure one in the course of personal history. Erik Erikson argued that human identity was generated and solidified through the resolution of seven psycho/sexual/social crises that characterize different moments of the human life span. He affirms that human identity is acquired from a

combination of factors as diverse as genetics, social class, and personal accomplishment.¹³

We affirm this but also note that achieved identities or inherent identities are not ultimate identities and often conflict with the christological identity that is the theological reality of authentic human nature.

All people are able and compelled to find meaning in procured identity. No one is born with an identity. We must receive, create, or locate identity somewhere. Christian identity and self-definition must often compete with other ways of understanding identity. For the Christian, genuine selfhood is found in relationship to the trinitarian God, who in the course of the historical process of an individual's life, creates a self-identity compatible with the nature of God's essence. Erikson's theme is that crises produce identity. For him there is no real human nature. Human nature is unformed at birth. Personal identity results from negotiating important life crises as well as participation and indoctrination into a particular culture which is learned, introjected, and then serves one as one's personal executive function to negotiate the vicissitudes of life. Identity is a mass-produced entity somewhat typical of others in that same culture. The self is society reflected on the scale of human personality.

Our consideration theorizes sin as the neglect to develop a theological identity and settling for a conferred or acquired identity or failing to integrate a conferred or acquired identity into a theological identity. Sin means that selfhood is primarily defined by such identities as national, cultural, educational, social, political, economic, gender or in the case of modern secular society, by professional or vocational status. Sin is not

¹³ Erikson, *Childhood and Society*.

primarily a moral category, but rather an existential and theological classification that indicates what Hans Schwartz calls an aversion from God, and induces the “disruption of the life-giving and life-sustaining relationship between God and humanity.”¹⁴

When an individual breaks away from the intimacy and fellowship that God offers and creates, then the individual is on his or her own either to receive or create an identity. Sin is predominantly secularity and the over-investment in secular identity and selfhood which has resulted from science, technology, and the expanding intensified organization and management of all aspects of society. This has brought the feeling that the individual is no longer the image of God, but instead the equivalent and replacement for God.

Pastoral theology and caring is the facilitating of the search for a personal center in this model. The idea of the self, while complex and described in diverse mechanisms and models, ultimately has to do with defining and comprehending a personal center of identity. When poets like W. H. Auden talk about the “center not holding,” they are referring to the phenomena of lack of substantive, real, personal essence.¹⁵ Identity crises are a normal part of life and help to focus and refocus and create a person’s individuality and relationality upon a lasting core of self that is not based on some trite or arbitrary choice or source. One of the themes of this dissertation is to indicate the way in which mature Christian identity is appropriated by way of what we are calling edge experiences

¹⁴ Hans Schwartz, *Our Cosmic Journey: Christian Anthropology in the Light of Current Trends in the Sciences, Philosophy, and Theology* (Minneapolis: Augsburg Publishing, 1977), 195-200.

¹⁵ W. H. Auden, “The Age of Anxiety,” in *Collected Poems*, ed. Edward Mendelson (New York: Random House, 1976), 343ff.

to seizing and securing a solid identity in God's gracious, trinitarian life.

An analysis of the modern self for our pastoral theology and for the practice of caring for the laity invites us to inquire more deeply into the nature of human identity and not simply assume with the sociologists that people's identities are solely the cumulative influence of identity factors such as age, sex, race, life history, body-type, familial, and vocational roles. The question of religion and the religious dimension of human experience forces us one step further in the question of identity. We want to describe how the various roles and identity factors described by personality and sociological theory are integrated into the individual's self-understanding, self-presentation, and self-identity, and how the person understands those roles and factors in a struggle for the most authentic self-realization of his or her humanity. The person who bears a religious consciousness, in this case a consciousness of being addressed by the trinitarian God, understands the individuality and meaning of the personal self as greatly surpassing the societal designation of its meaning and value. She understands both vocation and social roles as possible means to authentic personhood, as she attempts to harmonize these individual factors and roles with the knowledge of God and human destiny of fellowship with God.

Therefore, the idea of a false self would be equated with the construction or the development of the self-identity or personality as having an existence outside of a disposition and movement toward the trinitarian God. In this case, the self is conceived as autonomous and as its own center of creation and evolution. Self-centeredness or self-fulfillment would become dominant self-metaphors as a way of adequately reflecting the lack of connectedness to God as the true source of the self's authenticity. Presumably, one

would then somehow engage the environment in a way that would facilitate genuine self-evolution and authenticity, and therefore, will authentic self-hood. The self would then become the frame of reference and its own basis of authentic selfhood and somehow relate back to itself in an attempt to freely decide and will new expressions of authenticity.

It would be difficult to conceive exactly how this would be possible, or how any type of real growth could take place within the self. It also would be difficult to account for any type of free moral decision making. The problems of self-origin, self-stability, self-evolution and the establishment of self-goals and self-transcendence almost seem insurmountable in non-theistic self-models. The idea of God as origin, stabilizer, catalyst, and goal of the self, certainly has its advantages. If the human species is willed by God, who has created us as self-aware creatures, true selfness finds its consummation in the awareness of a connection to this other holy Self, in differentiation from our own self, who centers us, and creates freedom for us. Further, this holy Self enables us to freely chose, freely move beyond our present self-position and expression of self, and encourages the appropriation of the loving power and expansiveness of the divine being.

Self-denial and self-fulfillment are problematic metaphors for understanding the human self in relation to the triune God. A good conceivable model of the human self is the one proposed by the Roman Catholic theologian, Bernard Lonergan. He affirms that the most appropriate metaphor for the authentic expression of human identity is confirmed in the concept self-transcendence.¹⁶ Lonergan chose the concept of

¹⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 104.

self-transcendence because his analysis of the human situation has led him to the conclusion that an individual fulfills human destiny in so far as that person is not locked up in the present self but moves outward beyond the present state of the self toward God. This dynamic involves a self which continues to include but surpass earlier, less authentic self-postures.

This movement toward self-transcendence initially involves curiosity, imagination, and wondering witnessed in the small child and later develops into idea, theory, system, scientific inquiry, and ultimately, finds expression in art, morality, and religion as its most sublime embodiments. Lonergan asserts that in all human longing for that which is just beyond our immediate state, the question of God is implicit. He also proposes that the transcending of the present state of the self for relationship with God is the fundamental fulfillment of all conscious human intentionality, no matter what the endeavor or enterprise. The ultimate transcendence is expressed in what Lonergan calls the human self becoming a being-in-love through relationship and intimacy with one's fellow humans and creatures, and loving them all in intimacy and relationship with the triune God. It is this being-in-love with God that brings human identity and destiny to completion in a radical joy and peace in loving one's neighbor. This prevents the accruing of a false identity and destiny through the investment of the self in trivial and arbitrary designs.¹⁷

Lonergan notes that self-transcendence is not a product of human knowledge, design, or choice, and cautions us about the concepts of human development and fulfillment. Self-transcendence is the self's advance through a process which involves understanding

¹⁷ Wolfhart Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, trans. Matthew O'Connell (Philadelphia: Westminster Press, 1985), 21.

the process as both a task for realization as well as a divine gift. Pannenberg notes that the decisive understanding for theological anthropology is that:

no matter what terms we choose to use, however, the final insight must always be that actualizing the disposition for divine likeness is not merely a task that we are to perform on our own, even though our participation--our active participation in the process of our own history—is not to be excluded. Only God can cause the image of himself to shine in us. A warning that theology must take to heart is Herder's observation that we cannot hew out or fashion the image of God that has been set in us but are referred to the working of a divine providence through tradition and teaching, reason, and experience. The moment we take our destiny of fellowship with God into our own hands, we are already sinners and have missed the mark.¹⁸

The idea that all human beings are given freedom for operative partnership in the course of their own formation is a fundamental constituent in the network of occasions through which God works. This partnership requires a responsible, discerning awareness of God's activity and God's design for the human self, one available to us through the theology and ministry of the church.

Pannenberg sums up the difficulty in an anthropology of self-fulfillment as human accomplishment when he declares that in order for this to be possible, human beings would have to be already what they were to become. Destination implies future, and future implies God, and human unfinishedness and the possibility of human finishedness relies upon the future that God intends for humanity.¹⁹

Pannenberg also makes the point that the modern anthropological sciences have discovered that certain tendencies characterizing humanity cohere with basic Christian

¹⁸ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2: 228.

¹⁹ Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 60.

teachings about the human self. The concept of self-transcendence for Pannenberg is characterized by several essential features that modern scientific and philosophical anthropology assert about the character of human nature. The most important of these is the concept of human openness to the environment and world. The unfinished state of the human being causes the human individual to be in an almost continuous predicament of restlessness and unrest with the state of things. Sartre, too, affirmed that human existence was characterized as a “transcending of the given” as beings who range farther and over merely being alive.²⁰ Pannenberg affirms that this constitutional openness epitomizes and encapsulates the essential and special character of the human.²¹

It is this openness to otherness that for Pannenberg typifies an aspect of the image of God in humanity as does the restless human longing for the other and connection to the other.²² The human is a creature featured by a personality and being for openness, ecstasy, and ec-centricity. This self is oriented toward moving to a greater appropriation of a center which it finds only in relation to something outside itself. The human is a creature who is not limited by the field of perception, but by original design, and is even moving beyond that which it already sees. Ultimately, the human finds its longings fulfilled in the yearning for finishedness in God. Pannenberg posits:

Even when they move beyond all experience or idea of perceptible objects they continue to be exocentric, related to something other than themselves, but now to an Other beyond all the objects of their world, an Other that at the same time embraces this entire world and thus ensures the possible unification of the life of

²⁰ John Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness* (New York: Doubleday, 1956), 547.

²¹ Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 63.

²² *Ibid.*, 63.

human beings in the world, despite the multiplicity and heterogeneity of the world's actions on them.²³

This essential openness of humanity exists not only in religious life but in practical life and recreational life, in the life of art, culture, play, and work. David Tracy shows how it operates in science, morality, philosophy, and linguistics as well.²⁴ However, it does need to be pointed out that this constitutional openness as an openness toward God and the urge toward appropriation of the divine likeness is not at first understood as a reference to God. This only becomes the tangible case in light of the actual occasion of the historic encounter with God in the ways in which God is mediated.

Religious language typically identifies human identity and destiny in terms of a summons, a call, a challenge, a demand to move outward and beyond present self-location, in connection to others and in relationship, and to continue toward novel discovery, experience, expansion, and evolution into the divine likeness. Human existence is drawn to and shaped by the divine reality and ought to cooperate with the divine reality without trying to avoid, dodge, or take advantage of the trinitarian reality of God.

The pastor as spiritual director can assist as a mediator between the parishioner and God in this process. The open quality of the human self means that the pastor enable the parishioner to turn in the right direction in order to grasp a relational communion with the true goal of that longing openness which seeks identity and destiny in God in the manner of the Son.

Thus, in the Trinity, the self finds the way to completion, destiny, and identity by

²³ Ibid., 69.

²⁴ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 94-104.

following the way of Christ and allowing the Father through the Spirit to graciously grant the actualizing of the divine disposition. While this may strike us as uncomplicated and even effortless, nothing could be farther from the truth. This is because the dynamic, which almost seems paradoxical at times, is that the spiritual life, in terms of being drawn into and transformed by the trinitarian field of force, means that one has to strive and not strive at the same time. Spirituality of the kind we propose here, is negotiating between two poles of directing ourselves according to our personal choices, inasmuch as we have freedom to choose, and at the same time, guarding against the delusion that significant transformation can occur without the divine being escorting us into the eternal sphere. It is helpful to remember that self-transcendence is primarily a gift.

The outcome for the ~~human self of relatedness to God is manifested in certain relational~~ qualities of spirit and ways of being-in-the-world which embody the relational qualities of spirit and ways of being-in-the-world typical of the divine community of beings. These qualities have as their focal point the concepts of self-distinction that creates space for otherness and self-distinction that creates space for freely loving in relation.²⁵

Since human constitutional openness can drive humans toward almost any object in the human movement for self-transcendence, this basic religious and theological impulse can attach itself to entities that devalue human relations and personality, or even bypass it completely. Lonergan asserts that in the absence of an awareness that human openness is ultimately designed to be directed toward relationship and community with others and

²⁵ Colin Gunton, "Trinity, Ontology, and Anthropology: Towards a Renewal of the Doctrine of the *Imago Dei*," in *Persons, Divine and Human*, eds. Christoph Schwoebel and Colin Gunton (Edinburgh: T. & T. Clark, 1991), 59.

God, what often replaces it leads to trivialization, hedonism, harshness, cruelty, violence, despair, and absurdity.²⁶ The appropriation of the divine likeness, which is both gift and task, means that the personal is primary and God as person(s) and humanity as person(s), created in the fashion of God's own self-differentiated community of three persons, are designed for mutuality, friendship, communion, community, and directed outwardly to the divine Other and human others.

Pneumatology and the Self: The Field of the Spirit and the Creation of Persons and Community

The Spirit, as person, creates along with the Father and Son, and has a life and reality whose being sustains and preserves creatures by the continual and determined divine presence. The divine field of force as Spirit nurtures the transformative rhythm and revisions of the creatures.

The Spirit has its most dramatic transforming effect upon the human individual who turns the constitutional human openness toward the Spirit in freedom and love, engaging the Spirit's energy and life, and allowing the Spirit to present to the individual what the biblical attestation calls fruits and gifts. These gifts and fruits constitute the novel, authentic, human identity conferred by God upon the available, open person.

Human freedom, therefore, is best invested in loving the divine and entering into relationship with the divine persons. As important as personal independence is for any understanding of human being and the movement of the human personality toward transformation and progressive elaboration of the self, the notion that humans are created

²⁶ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 105.

as free from their true identity in relation to God is an error leading ultimately to an exaggeration of the both idea of freedom and human identity. Without the proper grounding in God and the working and cooperation with the divine field of force, human freedom will ultimately move toward some other source or anchor for rootedness. Human openness will attach onto some locus that ultimately results in self-diminishment for the self and for others who come into contact with that self. Then the self becomes twisted and rooted in something that cannot take it where it was designed to go and the result will be inevitably tragic and distressing. This condition is described accurately by Paul in Rom. 1:18ff where he argues that the human self-center when rooted in something other than God ultimately leads to the undoing and destruction of both authentic self and authentic community and the peaceful, loving communion that is the goal of the movement of self-transcendence.

The creative transformation into an authentic self implies a metamorphosis of the psychological, heteronomous, decision-making, executive ego into a deeper structure Paul called the inmost self, the one that takes delight in God and is invested in God as its origin and goal. This self is consciously invested into God's field of energy, through prayer, worship, and study, and assumes an identity reflecting what Paul calls in scripture the New Adam or image of Christ. It is at this point that self-denial takes on its truest meaning by not referring to destructive or socially unacceptable self impulses, but rather in terms of the denying of some humanly created self-identity and self-constitution in an entity like the ego, where it is assumed that this organizing agent called the ego is the source of psychic unity, progression, and self-identity, and results from achieving victory

over developmental or other crises apart from any aid or grounding in divinity.

Pannenberg points out the serious errors that non-theistic notions of the human personality consistently fail to address.²⁷

The religious call to conversion conveys the change from the self unconcerned or uninvolved with God as personal center of identity, to that self changed by God into a dramatically different self-identity, where the personal center of self would be located outside the former personal center and in the dynamism of the trinitarian God.

The former sources, relations, identities, and goals of the self become transformed by the conscious involvement in the divine trinitarian field of force. God can then enable the achieving of the presence of the true authentic self and God can further, enable the stability of that self and the new self-identity in the divine being.

The idea of the self in our theological anthropology is to be understood both as having additional supernatural graced attributes added to the previously existing human self and the self as altered by the radical change in the locus and center of the self that brings about dramatic change and ways of being-in-the-world. If true self exists at all in the reality of former self or unredeemed self or self before relation with God, then those traces of true self are evidence that the ego or human self is, to a limited extent, graced by nature. The biblical witness and the tradition, particularly in the passionate and extravagant language used to describe the remarkable transformations occurring in the human soul and witnessed in human behavior, indicate that something more is going on than the slow, creeping unfolding of character or the healthy execution of life crises and stages. Rather,

²⁷ Pannenberg, *Anthropology in Theological Perspective*, 210-17.

in some manner, the disposition of the authentic divine-human encounter is of such momentum that the individual experiences the self as being carried ecstatically beyond previous natural development and possessing a remarkable reorientation and de-centralization of self and its following re-centralization of self in God.

In the experience of the human subject regarding the extent of the human self to grow, generally the individual does not experience an ability within his or her own power to change the personality in the radical fashion that is indicated by the biblical language of new humanity, new Adam, new creation, and the religious experience that one has not so much achieved a new place for the self as that one has been transported to a new place of being. The growth in love, liberation, and freedom that one experiences is that one's identity is still in continuity and connectedness with the old self, but that one is now more able to be truer to the perceived divine reality engaging one, and one becomes emancipated to be in the world in ways that were not possible to one before. These ways are typically more holy and more radically beautiful, tranquil, and loving.

The true self in relation to God struggles to become what it is not yet. It is not yet the true, authentic, christological self that God wills and calls it to be, because its center still lies outside God and invested in a great deal of social conventions, norms, folkways, mores, and prejudices that we would call, to a large extent, the false self. This former self is the self which the Christian tradition says an individual must transcend.

The socially constructed, culturally conditioned human self is hopefully on the path to divine likeness, but the development of the true self or divine likeness is often in radical discontinuity with the empirical self. The act of putting faithful, loving trust in God is the road that gets one away from the staleness, instability, conventionality, and

inauthenticity that are the results of the despairing experience that the old self produces.

The authentic human self is characterized by the dynamics of a strong transformative thrust. The predicament of the human self in its quest for authentic identity and destiny finds its answer in the Christian affirmation of the creation and historical process of creative transformation of the individual self into a self that understands and experiences its worth and relatedness to God and, through God, those others the tradition calls neighbor. We now would like to proceed to an explication concerning the manner in which this transformation might be more fully understood.

CHAPTER 6

Transformative Religious Experience

Nuances and Dynamics

For our pastoral theology and the practice of congregational caring, the minister must be sensitive to the interior divine initiative. She must be permeated with the divine field of force, like a sponge in water, and be able both to distinguish and to communicate the subtle dynamics of that force to the lay person in her care. The practice of spiritual discernment has a long tradition and goes back to data found within the earliest records of the community's discernment practices. This data, the biblical texts, are the focus of pastoral theology and care for our designed model.

Our theology will be supported by a fundamental source of information about God within the scripture. The use of scripture for our theology will be governed by auxiliary hypotheses designated to explicate the hard core of the program. The influence of scripture relates to our hard core and serves as data about reliable and valid information about the nature of God as it impinges upon the self and is perceived by the self in the religious experience of the divine-human encounter.

Christian texts take various configurations and are interpreted in different manners depending upon the hard core of the program they are being used to explicate. Here scripture functions to explicate the nature of authentic experiences of the divine. Scripture possesses reliable, and therefore, repeatable and valid, and therefore, accurate information respecting the actions of the divine spiritual field of force. It serves as a record of the earliest example of a source of discernment criteria for designating the attendance and operation of God.

The earliest Christian texts are not primarily here a reflection of early church theology, a history of the development of the church, or a record of ecclesiastical moral and ethical norms. Nor are they simply a record of the early Christian community's opinions or speculations about the nature of God. Although they contain elements all of these and more, the New Testament scriptures serve for us as parameters for reflection upon and making decisions about the accuracy of the divine content of human psychic life. The experience of the early church regarding the discernment of the Spirit and its gifts and fruits can serve today as an example and model of the accurate nature of the effort and accomplishment of God's Spirit and its counterpart in human religious experience.¹

This theology affirms both the design and the influence of deity upon creatures. Classically this was expressed in ideas like divine providence and ongoing creation. The Spirit of God engages in the task of transforming the natural human ego into the authentic self as we outlined the idea of the evolving human self and its christological structure in the last chapter. As the creative field of force and agency of God, the Spirit not only creates and sustains the human in every moment of existence, the Spirit of the trinitarian God is present to the human individual within the human self's psychic interiority. The Spirit has as its goal the realization of the divine likeness in the human interior inner self. This looming movement can be fathomed and charted and can serve as a primary focus for pastoral caring in the work of the clergy with the laity. The effects of the Spirit upon the human self are the inaugural outcomes (first fruits) and guaranty of the transformation into the image of Christ, as the self becomes related in the Spirit to the Father through the

¹ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 151.

Son and to others. The actuality of the Spirit has substantive empirical outcomes in the human self in the present and culminates in the immortal life as seen in the resurrection of the Son into eternity.

The goal of human evolution is the transformation into the divine likeness which is both task and gift, but at heart, gift. Because this is our driving vision for this model of a theology of pastoral care, we now explore the biblical record for data which define the particular forms of the transformed human self. These are recognizable in the individual, and they can serve to verify both the presence and action of the Spirit upon the human self and, as a result, contribute as the focus of pastoral spiritual evaluation and direction.

It is our belief that the human self is created over, above, and through what we have called the natural human ego, the entity of human personal identity that is the subject of sociology and the personality sciences. The natural, given self (the old Adam) ought to be transformed into the authentic human self (the new Adam). Such evolution results not as much from social, cultural, and family forces, as it does from a deliberate, undefended, and resolutely surrendered openness to the activity and impulses from the divine trinitarian field of force. This produces character and identity exceedingly more authentic than what is possible of the natural, given self apart from God.

The human experience of God can be codified and structured through culture, tradition, and institutions, especially sacred institutions, all of which can prep the individual for divine encounter. Additionally, God comes to each individual for intimate fellowship and has disposed and designed human beings for this divine encounter and the operation of the providential Spirit in a process of self-evolution. But with the extensive amount of psychic material coming into human consciousness, it is necessary for the pastor and parishioner to be able to differentiate the divine material from the non-divine field, see the results of this

encounter in the lives of persons, and help them reflect upon this data or material as an effective manner of pastoral caring. We must find in the tradition suitable data which enables us a discernment which has a bearing upon the nature of God. D. C. Macintosh writes:

All religious experience is material for the psychology of religion; [which] has no criterion for distinguishing between true and false religions: it cannot say the first thing about the existence or nature of God.... The scientific theologian, therefore, will have to select from the manifold of religious experience those elements which give knowledge of God, just as the physicist selects from the multitude of the elements of sense-experience those which are of importance for the understanding of the nature of matter and energy. The theologian must therefore not only have access to religious experience; he must have the proper means for distinguishing the divine.²

William Alston affirms this tradition of personal interior occurrence of Christian religious experience. He postulates that it is the experience of leading a Christian life that corroborates Christian belief. Further, the rational structure of Christian belief is based upon interior experience.

Alston writes that such Christian assertions are believable because they are verifiable. Human experience mediates the reality and the experience of God. This encounter of intimacy with the divine is believable and rational because of the reliable and valid evidence concerning the experience of God. He asserts:

somehow what goes on in the experience of leading the Christian life provides some ground for Christian belief, makes some contribution to the rationality of Christian belief. We sometimes feel the presence of God; we get glimpses, at least of God's will for us; we feel the Holy Spirit at work in our lives, guiding us, strengthening us, enabling us to love other people in a new way; we hear God speaking to us in the Bible, in preaching, or in the words and actions of our fellow Christians. Because of this we are more justified in our Christian beliefs than we would have

² Douglas C. Macintosh, *Theology as an Empirical Science* (New York: Macmillan, 1919), 41.

been otherwise.³

Alston brings up a number of issues that we need to address about this experience of God that we are discussing for this project. Religious experiences of the encounter with God vary widely. However, for this project we are not generally concerned with those mystical states that possess a Zen quality of experienced emptiness or absence classically called the way of negation. We are not concerned here with the highest mystical peaks which manifest themselves as dark nights. There will be negation involved in the transformation that comes to the ego as it encounters the living God, and there will be always a sense of not having God even while possessing God, since God is both present and just beyond present attainability, and thus, beyond our reach. Religious experience for this project persist to the biblical tradition and not any advanced mystical traditions.

Religious experience as we understand it involves a mysticism of ordinary life and an intense form of encounter with God in faith and love, in which God takes the individual to his or her destiny and identity in the life of fellowship with God. This involves no alien, irrational, and occult phenomena that are normally described as ineffable. Our plan is more modest. It involves describing the nuances of the experiences of faith, hope, and love and the relational rapport created by the Spirit.

Within these parameters, it is important to select data from a wide range of ecumenical sources in order to insure we are isolating elements of the divine within the human psychic field and not simply elements of some particular tradition's understanding

³ William Alston, "Christian Experience and Christian Belief," in *Faith and Rationality: Reason and Belief in God*, eds. Alvin Plantinga and Nicholas Wolterstorff (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1983), 103.

of the divine. We need multicultural and multiple attestation of data. We will not only utilize biblical sources that are appropriate to this effort, but also sources from a number of different discernment traditions with the Christian tradition which developed from the biblical record and discernment practices in various communities of faith.

The assertion that God impinges upon our individual experience in order to change us into the divine likeness is attested throughout the New Testament record and the discernment tradition. The experience of this enables us to make assertions about God's nature and develop principles about the manner in which God effects human personality and human being-in-the-world. We would expect Christians to show real evidence and empirical confirmation of the reality of God's activity upon them if they take this divine offer seriously. We want to examine the character traits and ways of being-in-the-world which God brings about within the average Christian and show how this can be used as a guide for pastoral assessment.

Alston notes several basic items for examination, but only two of them are relevant to this particular project, specifically, that the Spirit is at work in the church and that the Spirit, the source of the divine likeness or New Life, as he calls it, produces qualities of character that are referred to in the biblical tradition as the fruits of the Spirit and are characterized by such virtues and moral qualities as love, joy, hope, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control.⁴ Since God is consistently and faithfully God in essence and activity, we would expect to find similar observable qualities across denominational boundaries that lead to an ecumenical model of pastoral

⁴ Ibid., 105.

care. The church has always postulated that the encounter with God produces qualities of character and moral conviction that are readily identifiable. In the writings of Paul, we first find this appeal to certain attitudes and behaviors as evidence of the divine being upon the human ego in the call of the apostle's charge to "test the spirits" and his insistence that the discerning mind could distinguish marks of this divine activity.

Alston also points out another major problem for theology and, particularly, a pastoral theology or pastoral spirituality such as is being proposed here. That is the problem of bifurcating human psychic experience into psychological datum and theological explanation. As we noted previously the human psychic field is complex and contains information from numerous sources and of different kinds and is somewhat tangled up within the mind and takes some care and consideration to isolate it out and untangle it. If we are going to offer a theological approach to pastoral care and not a psychological one we must refrain from divergent categories. Alston notes that this practice of explanation and interpretation of certain varieties and classes of human experience by Christian theological categories is an important feature of the Christian tradition.

We are going to restrict ourselves to those experiences in which people are attributing human virtue and behavior to be a fecund expression of their relationship with the living, trinitarian God. Individuals attest to the experienced reality of the divine field of force in their lives and attribute striking emotional and behavioral reconstructions to the activity of the holy God. They are convinced that they have encountered an Other Reality and that this reality has enabled them to be in the world in a way that was unavailable to them previously. Although God is other than human, God is not too other for us to

appreciate and comprehend. The divine love, faithfulness, and integrity assures us of experiencing God consistently, particularly since proving the reality of the experience of God is God's obligation. It follows that because of the divine essence, God's effort to self-disclose, and our God-given ability to comprehend and open ourselves to relationship with God, we should be able to discover regularities in the behavior of individuals who really open themselves to the divine field of force. Ultimately, we should be able to predict the type of behavior we would expect to see in an individual who takes seriously her or his call to creative transformation into the divine likeness.

Both Alston and Nancey Murphy show that these last features mentioned make a theology scientific, particularly if the perception of the divine which is involved is regulated by the critical supplementation of what they call Christian epistemic practices. These practices involve establishing authentic criteria for discriminating the fashion in which God's activities are to be recognized. These criteria remain open to criticism and correction by the entire community when refuting or contradicting circumstances are made evident.⁵ Alston calls these epistemic practices M-beliefs (M for manifestation). He posits that M-beliefs can serve as the appropriate data for theology and that they are able to stand up to the scrutiny of the scientific method.

While all Christians probably would agree that certain religious experiences are a genuine perception and response to the divine, some might postulate that the effects of such experiences are too vague or too slight to be noticed and measured. This would seem to contradict both the language of the biblical witness and the tradition, or it would

⁵ Ibid., 110.

mean that the hermeneutic we take to the biblical witness was inaccurate. Another issue which inevitably will arise with our model is the problem that the discernment criteria that emerge from the tradition of Christian spirituality is too diverse to comprehend and too diverse to reach any agreement upon concerning what the divine likeness or the transformed human self might look like.

Yet it seems to be strongly attested in Christian history that these claims are valid. It makes sense to believe that qualities of authentic humanity should be measurable. This is not to say that ultimately God is taking us toward uniformity of being. As we stated before, God seems to insist upon our uniqueness and freedom in our self-distinction from God and others in our own individuality. But the evidence points to the reality that certain human qualities are the outgrowth of direct relationship and intimacy with God and comprise a maturational sequence which fulfills the divine purpose for relatedness as God lures us toward our destiny in some type of loving fulfillment.

Theological ethics may have very diverse and even opposing tendencies as different communities of faith try to explicate the morality progressing from their perception of the holiness God imparts. Also, ethics will always be a response to the perceived issues in the environment and will differ in different communities. However, Christian character and the christological structure of human nature ought to be somewhat similar regardless of the pluralism which characterizes much of the Christian life. Human beings who draw close to God at God's gracious invitation ought to exhibit an authentic humanity which embodies divinity in each's human individuality.

Perception and interpretation are involved in all the soft sciences and also in this enterprise of theological pastoral care. Hopefully, this does not make the judgment about

the criteria we select invalid or a matter of opinion, since perception and interpretation are actual structures of the human mind and consciousness, and everything, even the hardest fact, must come through the human mind and be structured by the human mind at some point. Since every event is an event of the human mind, it involves a cognition of the event plus an interpretation of the cognition. This is true whether one is measuring quarks, level of anxiety, or impingement of the divine. The question here is whether our perceptions are true and accurate. The only means to test this is through scrutiny by the experts in the various scholarly communities, which, in the case of theology, would be the various communities of faith.

Accuracy of perception means two things. First, accuracy involves the reliability or repeatability of the observations. While the observations and subject matter of this pastoral theology are introspective and involve human interiority and what we have referred to as the rather crowded, bustling, human psychic field, this is the same field that psychology examines regularly with reliable results. We are examining this field for theological traces of divinity and assuming that, like a scientific researcher in the field of psychology, human interiority can be reliably probed for not only for psychological material of different sorts but theological material. The reliability of this practice would be challenged by a wild diversity of beliefs and practices associated with the divine field found across various denominational lines. We believe it possible to discover common elements of discernment that prove the reliability of this evaluation practice. Reliability also has to do with the credibility of this particular manner of approaching pastoral care. Reliability provides an objectivity to this pursuit by establishing that the subject and procedure be

repeatable. That is, we have to explore recurrent occasions in human experience, so that the entire design can be reproduced by other interested researchers.

The other key factor for producing objective research is that it be valid. The concept of validity means that we must show that the changes in human behavior that we are exploring are actually a result of the encounter with the divine field of force. Validity prompts us to provide a rationale that the criteria we are using to judge the actions of the Spirit upon the human personality are legitimate. We are asserting that gracious virtues and inclinations which produce community in relationship reflect the character of the divine being and exist in individuals who are intentional about receiving them because of the actions of God's spiritual field of force within the Christian community. These dispositions in the direction of a realized humanness in its christological structure are, we affirm, valid results and empirical evidence of God in human personality.

The point of this chapter up to this point has been to assert that theological facts are facts, and, as facts, they can be scrutinized and examined like other facts and do not differ from other classes of facts that scientific methods can be used to investigate. There are not two histories, real history and salvation history, there is just one history with various themes, including the history of salvation. Likewise there is just one human psychic field, but within this field there are various contents. We merely want to investigate the theological contents, if possible, and isolate them from the rest. This should help us to reach a conclusion concerning whether an individual is manifesting the kinds of behavior and affections that we would expect if that individual were intentionally open to the action and efficacy of God. The outcome of this is that we should be able to predict Christian behavior and concretize a set of criteria for use by pastors in their guidance and counseling.

work with the laity in the area of personal development and Christian personhood. We now need to turn to the earliest relevant data that is of consequence in the construction of this theology, the relevant themes in the texts of the New Testament.

David Kelsey has shown that all theological programs are driven by one principal driving feature. Our present task is to do what he suggests, namely, both to limit and to give direction to our program by the selection of just a motif and therefore “to catch up what Christianity is basically all about in a single, synoptic, imaginative judgment.”⁶ To summarize what was said earlier about our approach to scripture, the New Testament serves for us as the original data for our theology in that it is the earliest record and source for the kind of religious experience in our possession of the divine encounter which we are examining. Scripture functions in this project as an accurate source for criteria for recognizing the attendance and operation of the divine Spirit in the dynamics of its operative motion. Scripture is an historical document that functions in various ways, but here primarily as a source of understanding the operations of the divine Spirit and the human transformation the Spirit brings about.

The only real problem connected with this approach is the issue of whether scripture can be trusted to give us a picture of the way God operates upon individuals or whether it is adversely, only scuttlebutt about the way that the early church believed God operated upon the human personality. The only resolution of this is crucial problem is to cross-check scriptural data against similar data in the tradition of epistemic practices and against current experiences of God within the church. Hopefully, we will be able to indicate to a

⁶ Kelsey, *Uses of Scripture in Recent Theology*, 99.

reasonable degree of probability that scripture is in fact what we theorize it to be.

Discernment Practices in the Earliest Christian Communities

In the gospel of John and in the Pauline epistles, the Spirit and the Son are presented as distinct entities or discreet living realizations and actual concrete occasions of the divine field of force and, therefore, not absolutely identical, since Jesus is no longer in history. But the Spirit continues to have historical effect since it remains active within the church and the world as the Spirit of life. The Spirit continues the divine work of human rapport, reconciliation, and authentic human realization which typified Jesus' life, by drawing individuals through the church into the fellowship of the divine trinitarian life. This participation has empirical results in the life of the individuals who respond and these effects are characterized by religious language, that generally speaking exhibits an oddness characterized by peculiar human themes. That is, language about human-divine encounter and divine self-disclosure is often perceived as asserting remarkable claims that the human self, as it is socially constructed, is somewhat false, and that in the course of life, one is called by God to repent of this self, escape from its limitations by converting to another, quite different way of being-in-the-world, which is based upon the teachings that come to us from early church reflections on the history and meaning surrounding the person of Jesus.

Religious language is odd because it tends to call one away from the natural tendency of the self to be over-invested in the self and to become creatively transformed from egocentricity to a Godcentricity. This essentially involves a radical shift in the center of one's identity. The Spirit is the dynamism of God, which assists as catalyst to enable the

human self to achieve this striking modification. Robert Menzies argues that, in the theology of Paul, the Spirit has essentially two functions. The Spirit initially divulges the genuine meaning of the death and resurrection of Jesus Christ to the inquirer. Soon afterward, it gradually, but progressively, transforms one into the likeness of Christ.⁷

The New Testament Texts: The Gifts and Fruits of the Spirit

Yves Congar, a Catholic authority in pneumatology, states that in order to understand Paul, one must grasp that the dominant theme of all his theology is that “only God is able to lead us to his own sphere, his own inheritance, his own state of blessedness and his own glory, which is himself. Only God, in other words, can make us act divinely.”⁸ Congar draws from Thomas Aquinas who argued that the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love should go beyond the purely natural, given mode and therefore, not be limited by qualities which make their expression often seem casual, random, haphazard, and burdened with self-interest.

Congar affirms humans as naturally capable of virtue, but it is a very imperfect virtue. The Spirit is available to significantly raise the level of these virtues *supra modum humanum* or beyond the mode of the human. Congar notes that these virtues are not simply rational behavior, nor are they a form of direction controlled by a stiffly and enduringly established historical human nature. The divine likeness is not a matter of human reason or nature, but rather, comes from the intimacy of knowing and loving God

⁷ Robert Menzies, *Empowered for Witness: The Spirit in Luke-Acts* (Sheffield: JSOT Press, 1995), 316.

⁸ Yves M. Congar, *I Believe in the Holy Spirit*, trans. David Smith (New York: Seabury Press, 1983), 2:135.

who leads us, does not act without us, never employs coercion or violence, but who takes us beyond what we see in ourselves or expect from ourselves. God grants us rather what we see in God and expect from God. This is the distillation of self-transcendence, that we know and understand our limitations in terms of virtue, holiness, and loving and, at the same time, through and as an immediate aftermath of our intimacy with God, we watch these remarkable capacities grow astonishingly beyond what we are convinced we are capable of under our own steam.

Since we have asserted that religious experience is encounter with God and that these experiences leave one notably changed from egocentricity to Godcentricity, we need to explore the concrete reality of this reformation that comes from God. God is known only through human consciousness, but God's nature is known by the effect of God upon human nature, that is, by what God produces in human nature. An individual's relation to God can be discerned and assessed by the qualities of character or fruits that God produces in her through the Spirit. Through the creative activity of the Spirit, God rescues the humans from the entanglement in self-centeredness which comes as a result of their anxieties and misdirected desires.

Discerning the Qualities of God in the Early Church

In the New Testament texts, Bernard Cooke asserts, there are discernment criteria set up for three varieties of proceedings: doctrines like revelation and christology, questions of church order, discipline, and instruction, and finally, matters of conduct which include concern about comportment, courses of action, ethics, moral practices, and codes of right and wrong that were deemed appropriate in light of and effected by God's invasion into

the world and the church.⁹ Here we are interested in the criteria established by the early church which enabled it to distinguish the constitution and integrity of human character constructed in those seriously open to the actions of the Holy Spirit.

In his discussion of the fruits of the Spirit in the theology of Paul, Congar argues that the consequences of the Spirit's activity are concretized in the occasions of those qualities embodied in the famous lists of Paul or the Pauline school. While Paul was quite aware of the complex reality of the Spirit's activity in the nexus of human personality, and never made any particular single interior experience of God a litmus test for deciding authentic proof of the Spirit's activity, his letters are filled with extensive data about divine-human encounters which served as guidelines for the church. This is data that was and can be sorted, as Paul does, and understood as signifying strong tendencies characterizing this movement. Moltmann affirms that in these experiences of the Holy Spirit, God as the creator of new life is present to us in a new actuality that is properly summed up as novel availability to God's emotional, relational being that enriches human life where essentially the "heart expands."¹⁰ The divine empathy becomes the product in the human personality resulting from the shift in center and identity from human egocentricity into the locating of center and identity that results from being a new self constituted from the intimate relatedness with God. The human self is constituted by that to which it is related. If it is only related to the finite, ambiguous, transient, wobbly ego, then that self will be

⁹ Bernard Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments: History and Theology* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1976), 405-09.

¹⁰ Jurgen Moltmann, *The Spirit of Life: A Universal Affirmation*, trans. Margaret Kohl (Minneapolis: Fortress Press, 1992), 172.

misshapen and diminished, and turn out quite differently than if it is related to and realizes its identity in the holy Trinity.

The qualities that characterize the fruits seem to be the complex nuances necessary for the actual concretizing force of the Spirit within the human personality that enables human community as it moves toward the divine likeness. These qualities of character exist naturally in all humans to some degree, since all humans are created in God's image, yet the intimate fellowship with the triune God deepens these qualities as the outcome of the deepening relationship with God.

When we speak of transformation into the divine likeness, we are referring to God's will and the idea of will inescapably signifies productivity. This productivity of God is experienced in our human experience of a reality which presses in upon us with power, which in its dynamic wants something of us or is moving us in a particular direction, even though at first that direction might seem imprecise. This imprecision seems to characterize the individual's initial experiences with God.

But the individual can open up to the divine articulation in a manner that makes very precise that experience which was initially quite imprecise, unconscious, and somewhat indistinguishable within the nexus of the human psychic field. While this power we call deity is always to some extent unknown, we affirm a capability of some precise knowledge about divine ways. In this sense, theology is not different from other fields of human endeavor that progress toward more and more detailed analysis, articulation, and theory concerning the subject at hand. The purpose of any research program is to make clear and understandable that which is there but not clear. This leads not only to a greater

appreciation of the subtle majesty of the divine, but an ability to distinguish the divine impulse and its productive creativity upon the human personality.

Since we have characterized the divine force field of the Spirit as holy love, this is precisely what we would expect to be produced in the human personality, although they would be human expressions of the divine holy love. The New Testament tells us, not only that God is Spirit, but that God is love (1 John 4:8). God is love in essence, action, and effect. God is love in creation, in Christ, in the Word that reflects the experience of God, and in the divine loving Spirit who engages us. This Spirit of love produces loving expressions through the trinitarian wealth of its living realization in the human personality.

In Gal. 5:22, Paul notes that the Spirit actualizes love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control. Holy love is an actual concretion and cannot be understood either in God or in the human personality as a vague generality or a mere abstraction. Christianity asserts the historicity of the divine persons and their effect upon humankind. While all of God's attributes comprise a unity, they can be nuanced for analysis. Paul describes the effects of the divine field upon the human in terms of fruits, which are the effects of the Spirit upon those who let the Spirit come and allow it efficacy. Holy love is the name for the transcending of the human self and the development of a self in relation to God that creates real personhood and an ability for authentic human relations. When the obstacles (sins?) are cleared away, Paul notes the emergence or growth and modification of character traits that create personal relationships and community. Paul's reflection upon these qualities are an integral part of his epistles. A second briefer list includes purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, genuine love, and rejoicing (2 Cor. 6:6-9), while another includes righteousness, godliness, faith, love,

steadfastness, and gentleness (1 Tim. 6:11). Paul sees these types of human qualities as actualities of the breath and Spirit of God in human personal lives.

Michael Welker makes the point that the Spirit, as it was experienced at Pentecost, had the effect of favorably inclining community in a world drifted apart and overwhelmed by its diversity. The work of the Spirit does not encourage or produce theological, religious, linguistic, or cultural conformity, but rather, it produces a feeling of unity, love, and empathy in the midst of prolific pluralism and diversity where individuals and peoples were no longer able, without severe difficulty, to see their common humanity. The Spirit creates persons by creating a matrix of personhood in relationship through fashioning what Welker calls a “totally unexpected comprehensibility and an unbelievable, universal capacity to understand and relate by persons of diverse backgrounds where the experience of plural inaccessibility to each other and of enduring foreignness and unfamiliarity on the one hand are overcome by an utter commonality of the capacity to understand.”¹¹

The Spirit’s project at Pentecost was experienced by the early church as creating the ability for persons to experience their individuality and self-distinction from each other and at the same time understand that their identity and destiny was inextricably connected with those who were so unlike them. Empathy and altruism is not simply an environmental survival strategy or mature defense mechanism, though it might be correctly argued that it is both. In fact, the early church found that its most momentous experience of the holy divine was in connection with a sacred relatedness to an other person quite different from oneself. It is important to appreciate that the experience of God in God’s otherness and

¹¹ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 232.

the capacity to understand and love and relate in community to distinct others are two subtle differences of one experience. The comprehension of God's divinity and the other person's sacred differentness are a unity in experience. Welker asserts:

These experiences of individuality do not correspond to those of modern ego consciousness. Instead one's own particularity is experienced in the midst of a consciously perceived polyindividuality and polyconcreteness, in the midst of diversity which, while foreign to the human individual person, through the Pentecost event allows and makes possible commonality and common experience and knowledge. In the midst of this foreignness, familiarity with self is preserved: the language of one's background is preserved—yet God's action is understood by all sides¹²

The Spirit's field of force continues the work of Christ in that it does not do away with diversity but rather it moves the individual out of identity with ego into what we call identity of self in relation to God. This enables a proper understanding and emphasis of social demographic attributes such as, for example, sexual orientation, gender, culture, language, or economics, all of which can create psychic isolation and alienation. Jesus' teachings, itineracy, exorcisms, and healings all aimed at the deconstruction of the importance of socially constructed, personal self identity and reconstruction of a self in relation to God. That self's characteristic trait was divine-like empathy. One of the most significant criteria to the early church concerning the authenticity of a divine encounter was the location of primary identity in the relationship with God, rather than with secondary social characteristics.

Precipitating an old identity and putting on a new identity in Christ can only mean the remarkable refocus of creative personal energies at a deeper level, indeed the deepest level

¹² Ibid., 233.

of reality, the actuality of God's being. The believing individual, who enters into the open life of the Spirit, enters into a relation with the Father similar to the one exemplified by Jesus. He or she enters into an acceptance of sacred creaturehood in love and solidarity with others and all creation, seeking for a life of virtue and beauty lived in intimacy with the Father in the field of the Spirit.

The Spirit affects the direction of the basic anthropological drive of openness and ecstasy toward the other person in an appreciation of that person's diversity, as an expression of the diversity of God. God makes the resonant abundance of the divine being available to the individual, who lives a self-distinct destiny and identity in his or her own uniqueness. At the same time, person lives a shared identity and destiny in the christological structure of existence. The true self of the individual becomes reformulated through interaction with the divine being and activity. Such a character trait would constitute an authentic consequence of the Spirit and ought to be present in meaningful form in the believer, recognizable by the pastor, and the focal point of individual work with a lay person.

Feelings of the holy were certainly an authentic part of the experience of the majesty of the living God. The complex experience of God's holiness was probably the most certain indication of authentic encounter with God. The issue here is to try to understand the manner in which this holiness would empirically manifest itself in the human self and could be assessed. Holiness implies a longing for fellowship with God and a desire that God's influence be asserted in the human sphere. Anything concerned with the theological life of Christian faith could actually be a manifestation of holiness. In particular, the transformation from natural self to true self is holiness.

We agree here with Moltmann that the finest manifestation of holiness in human life would be summed up in that personality characteristic or phenomenological stance designated by that which Albert Schweitzer called “reverence for life” (*furchtbar fur leben*).¹³ Otto points out that God’s holy love takes shape in the human in many ways and that, ultimately, it manifests in an attitude toward creature and creation that understands everything that was created as a mysterious manifestation of God’s being.¹⁴

Paul Pruyser argues that the awareness of the holy ought to be the first empirical category for pastoral assessment.¹⁵ Pruyser asserts that holiness is primarily a reverential feeling of awe or bliss. He affirms, like Otto, that holiness has a strong strain of sacred awe and creature-feeling in it. Considering that the feeling of holiness is probably the basis for all experience of God, it is crucial to explicate this feeling more thoroughly.

Moltmann observes that reverence for life should begin with the most vulnerable of God’s creatures. We suggest it includes a creation or green theology which warrants a protective, custodial, safekeeping of the plant and animal species and environments, as well as the biosphere and the various ecological niches which have developed in their remarkable and beautiful diversity. Reverence for life also means a respect for the most vulnerable of the human creatures, and that we embody what Latino liberation theology has called God’s “preferential option for the poor” (*opcion preferential por los pobres*). This includes, particularly, children, the poor, the undocumented, the elderly, the ill,

¹³ Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 172.

¹⁴ Otto, *Idea of the Holy*, 21.

¹⁵ Pruyser, *Minister as Diagnostician*, 62.

the oppressed, minorities, and the disenfranchised and unempowered in general.

Holiness, as reverence for life, also means the disavowal of violence. Marjorie Suchocki contends that violence can be understood as one of the most basic forms of sin.¹⁶ And while the causes of violence are many, and the forces behind it are sometimes very intense, reverence for life means mastery over violently aggressive ego impulses, far-reaching self-control, and the focusing of life's energies in creation rather than destruction. Reverence for life, therefore, follows the non-violent spiritual modality of Thoreau, Gandhi, and Martin Luther King, Jr.

Holiness ought to be understood as a feeling of sacred, mysterious awe. We would expect that feeling to be particularly excited and encountered in worship, but this feeling of holiness ought to be discovered as the general accompaniment or attendant music of lived feeling-emotion, like Mozart or Beethoven playing in the background, in which all things are done. It ought to be the basic stance for human being-in-the-world, whatever the task at hand is, even if it is not particularly religious or theological work.

Paul Pruyser notes that the diagnostic variable of providence ought to serve as a main criteria for assessing the lay person's encounter with the God.¹⁷ Pruyser stresses, for the lay person, providence tends to indicate the divine disposition and endowment toward oneself. His discussion of providence primarily tries to focus in on people who believe either that God is doing more than God does for people or those who believe that God

¹⁶ Marjorie Suchocki, *The Fall to Violence: Original Sin in Relational Theology* (New York: Continuum, 1994), 86.

¹⁷ Pruyser, *Minister as Diagnostician*, 64.

does very little and that what counts is personal competence and the ability to produce results. This presumably is the crux of the struggle for many Christians. We suggest it also be understood as the process of transformation into the authentic self and would accordingly broaden Pruyser's model.

Pruyser is correct about pointing to providence as a criteria for assessment, and our theological position when considering what providence might mean impels us to grasp providence in the idea that God is somehow involved in our lives and wrestle with how this might be possible. That is, we should see in the person someone committed to the transformative thrust that God is undertaking in the person, an experience in the person that change has taken place through this relationship with God, and the longing that it will continue. In this relational theology, we are explicating most of the traditional concepts within Christianity in a manner that illustrates their fulfillment in intimacy and fellowship with God.

During the canonization process within the Roman Catholic Church, the Congregation for the Causes of Saints at the Vatican, the theologians who establish the criteria for what constitutes a saint, above all, look for a substantial reputation for both holiness and an experience of the person's sense of providence.¹⁸ An individual candidate for beatification and, ultimately, sainthood, reflects divine grace in a lived existence exemplified by "heroic" virtue, another word for holiness and a life of intensity and interiority in regard to God's presence. Providence means a sense of God's presence and mystery and a life lived in astute awareness as a quest for God and for unity and

¹⁸ Woodward, *Making Saints*, 251 ff.

fellowship with God.

The sense of God's providence might be particularly difficult for many people to articulate, particularly given the few references to God that they run into in the course of their lives in a post-Christian world. This tends to give many lay people a sense that God is not real because God is not talked about. The fact remains that God is absent only for the person who has turned away from God. Therefore, there ought to be some sense of God's favorable guidance in a person's life, particularly in the area of self-growth.

Our model for caring asserts that the pastor is the one who encourages the lay individual to perceive God at the edges or boundaries of self and then embrace this self as the true self, that is, the self in intimate relation to God as it issues from old self. God encourages the divine being to be felt, and this presence, this sense of feltness, has a number of important qualities which can be understood by the individual lay person and explored in spiritual direction by the pastor with the layperson.

The pastor ought to enable intimacy with God and assist to create a sense of the divine presence which is more concrete and understandable. Welker suggests:

The Holy Spirit brings about intimacy with God. Indeed, the Spirit is this intimacy. This intimacy draws us into the overwhelming fullness of the presence of God. Yet, this intimacy is not to be confused with an ineffable, obscure, mystical relationship whose intensity condemns us to say nothing, or whose hypercomplexity leads to diffusion and dissolution of determinate experience. Inasmuch as the Spirit effects intimacy with God, the Spirit makes possible an intimate relation with God that allows us to recognize the diversity of God's action of kindness and righteousness, of judgment and deliverance, and that makes it possible for human beings to recognize and to locate themselves and their relative worlds in this action.¹⁹

The key virtue connected with the notion of providence would be an obliging yielding.

¹⁹ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 331.

Providence here is greatly connected with another theological virtue, that of trust. While often trust is connected with the theological virtue of faith, it also has deep connections with the reality of providence. In the new humanity witnessed in Christ, we observe a naïve, childlike, trusting quality for the reality and goodness of God. The vague sense of the God who we trust develops as we differentiate ourselves from the world, God, and others, including especially our significant mothering one, who can be the basis for all later trust and feelings of divine providential assurance and confidence.²⁰

As one experiences God in God's self-distinctness from oneself, one's world, and one's early experiences with parenting ones, even if the early experiences have been, sadly, more a source of anxiety and mistrust, the strength of God to demonstrate the divine reality as a concrete actuality which can be trusted, means one ought to manifest an attitude that corresponds to this reality. In a sense, the trust coming from a feeling of God's providential guidance means that we have differentiated God from ourselves and have somewhat already achieved the ability to discern that in the psychic field which comes from God. Over the course of human life, if one stays at it, the God-consciousness, the sense of holiness, and the trust will grow and one's self-experience will be much more satisfying, since appropriating the divine image is intensely gratifying. If the pastor finds an individual who has little sense of the divine presence, he or she can only conclude that the individual must have at some deep level turned away from the divine source of her existence who sustains humanity at every moment of its breathing life.

Providence is the self-transcendent movement in which one has concretely fallen in

²⁰ Ana-Maria Rizzuto, *The Birth of the Living God: A Psychoanalytic Study* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1979); Erikson, *Childhood and Society*.

love with God in an ardently passionate and unrestricted fashion. Providence refers to the love of God as God floods the human heart with the divine essence in the field of the Spirit. Lonergan argues that, ultimately, all loving consists in self-transcendence.²¹ Providence suggests that the pastor check in with the parishioner as to whether he or she feels and is flowing with this convincing field of transforming love.

Our model of assessment encourages assistance with the self-awareness and self-assessment of the actuality of virtue and character. The Roman Catholic Church searches for a number of qualities composing the structure of holiness or sanctity as it tries to assess whether an individual ought to be canonized or not. These include a solid reputation for holiness or Christlike character in which is manifested specific virtues.

Theological orthodoxy is not unimportant but not strongly emphasized here and only secondarily are judgments concerning theological orthodoxy considered. A wildly unorthodox theology which challenges some of the basics of what we understand about the nature of God might be cause for concern and reason for deeper exploration. Pastoral assessment here focuses upon the relationship one has and feels with God and the qualities of character God grants the person in the course of the relationship with God. The biblical witness attests to three types of criteria for discernment: relative agreement with the orthodox positions, production of Christlike character, and unity in love within the vivid, kaleidoscopic diversity of the Christian community.²² These last two serve as the basis for what this model argues is adequate in the task of pastoral evaluation.

²¹ Lonergan, *Method in Theology*.

²² Cooke, *Ministry to Word and Sacraments*, 405.

The formation of an identity expressed in the reality of character for us is not simply action or expression based upon ethical principles or stages of growth, though stages of growth or abstract moral principles might be postulated from the concrete actuality of the forming character. Rather, we affirm that character emerges as a gift of God as the person entangles and surrenders his center of identity to the living God who creates the divine likeness in the course of life in a Christian community. The character created is manifested as gift of self and maintained in and through the field of the Trinity's action in and through the church which provides the narrative structure for the self-gift. At the same time the community, through God's action, deepens and broadens the evolving self gift.²³

Theologian Stanley Hauerwas posits that character can no longer be understood as a simple and obvious application of universal principles, nor as a natural developmental unfolding. Kohlberg and Fowler have been seriously criticized for their failure to posit any specific content to character other than the virtue of justice which comes, they note, from belonging to a just community.²⁴ Character is more than the struggle for justice in situations of social conflict resulting from oppression, although it certainly must include that virtue. Here love is the highest form of character, since justice cannot form the basis of our relationship with God who is already just.

Juridical virtue never quite fulfills the human quest for intimacy, community,

²³ Stanley Hauerwas, "Character, Narrative, and Growth in the Christian Life," in *Toward Moral and Religious Maturity* (Morristown, N. J.: Silver Burdett, 1980), 441-81.

²⁴ Philip Philibert, "Some Cautions on Kohlberg," *Living Light* 12 (1975): 527-34.

and friendship, all of which humanize justice. The most promising empirical manifestation of character finds better expression in a number of moral qualities and capabilities we call virtues and integrity. Hopefully these are found in all Christians, but they are particularly evident in the revered saints of the church, who have been graced with the ability to open themselves to God who was then able to grant the *imago dei* to them in remarkable, heroic dimensions.

Traditionally, in the Roman Catholic Church, the criteria for declaring saints followed the course of investigation regarding the way in which the three theological virtues of faith, hope, and love played out in a life and to what extent.²⁵ Individuals who were nominated for canonization needed to possess the theological virtues at an archetypal degree and proportion. This was an indication that the holiness characteristic of the canonized reached an extraordinary level, a level often suggested by the word perfection and implicating that the theological and moral character of those designated as saints was an indication that they were not simply “lovers of God,” as Moltmann puts it, but indeed, it could be inferred by the excellence, supremacy, and qualitative actualization of the virtues that they were “friends of God,” since only a life lived very close to God could exhibit the virtues to such a degree.²⁶

For the purpose of pastoral evaluation these virtues ought not be expected in a heroic sense by everyone in the parish. They should serve as the focus of spiritual direction with lay persons with the understanding that the appropriation of them and the deepening of

²⁵ Woodward, *Making Saints*, 393.

²⁶ Moltmann, *Spirit of Life*, 182.

them is characteristic of intimacy with God. Moreover, it is important to realize that growth in grace and the appropriation of virtues will vary from person to person.

The New Testament witness concerning the primacy of the theological virtues is distinct. The theological virtues are indispensable and verify the reality of one's relational intimacy with God. They ought to be discussed without appearing rigid and arbitrary, and without giving the impression that not to possess them somehow indicates evidence of human failure. These virtues are part of the natural, given self, but in relationship with God, over time, more ought to appear and at a more profound level.

From this basic exploration of the idea of religious experience as self-transcendence and a few of its most important New Testament meanings, we will next present a more nuanced clarification of the two types of opportunities for religious experience and evolution in self-transcendence.

CHAPTER 7

The Affirming Edge Experience

A Heuristic of the Edge

The purpose of this chapter and the following is to explicate our concept of edge experiences and their meaning for pastoral care and the formation of Christian character. This formation is featured by the disinvestment of ego-functioning and the reinvestment of a more theologically-driven self, in which individual identity, in its idiosyncrasy and disposition, primarily becomes a self in relation to God. This novel self-creation is primarily a divine gift, yet it is also, importantly, a human task that calls for attention to God concerning the divine work in the human soul or psychic field. This task lays claim to a competent spiritual and pastoral mentor to aid in this process. This final claim calls for the parish minister enter into and provide a therapeutic spiritual alliance with the individual lay person, where the clergy can enable the edge experiences to be the mill where the loving trinitarian God modifies and recreates the human self.

This design is based upon a number of propositions that we have earlier outlined, among them being that this model of pastoral theology will primarily utilize prevalent and universal human edge experiences and interpret these by using the adequate and appropriate classic texts of the New Testament in this heuristic. This is called for since these texts are normative in the Christian community for understanding the actions of God upon the human personality. We hope to correlate common human edge experiences, which we understand as the growing edge of human selfhood and personality, where the contours and substance of the divine-likeness materialize and become a concrete

actuality, with the classic and appropriate biblical texts. This will illuminate the actual phenomenological manifestation. Character forms somewhere in the person as the person hands himself or herself over to the trinitarian God, who formulates the new human self. This is the place and focus of the pastor's work in this model.

The appropriation of the divine likeness takes place over a lifetime and, for the most part, is a continuous, gradual, progressive happening directly related to one's commitment to the process in the context of the faith of the community in the intimacy and fellowship of the Trinity. There is also common to this transformation into a christological self, elements of this appropriation that we would call spurts or bursts of self-growth where the expansion is experienced by the individual as irregular and extraordinary moments where the quality of divine engagement is heightened. This results in an exceptionally strong inclination toward, and fondness for, God where human vulnerability results in a perfect openness to God, a state we have called both eccentric and ecstatic, since it enables a person to get into touch with the movement of God in which one falls in love with God enough to permit God to assist the individual with the appropriation of the divine self.

The edge moment refers and conducts us to God, and strengthens the constitutional openness toward God that we possess, but often lose touch with during the course of everyday life, which calls for a great deal of so-called practical, ego-type functioning. Edge experiences, typically, are human occasions experienced by all humans everywhere. They tend to be anything but run-of-the-mill events. They are more properly characterized as extraordinary, peculiar, exceptional moments of pleasure and pain, affirmation and negation, which bring us to realize that we cannot simply continue to function in the ego

mode. They call us, through the enjoyment and delight of the affirmative edge experience, or conversely, through the ache and agony of the negative edge experience, to open ourselves more to the love of God, become increasingly connected to God, and through that vital new connectedness, feel ourselves and experience ourselves as something beyond that which we were, previous to the edge experience. This “more” is related to a perceived and felt expansion and augmentation in our character and in the quality of our personality. It is connected with our self-understanding and our self-experience.

The Edge Dimension of Human Experience

Jurgen Moltmann, whose theology greatly influences this theological project, writes that “theology has but one single problem: God. We are theologians for the sake of God. God is our dignity. God is our agony. God is our hope.”¹ He continues:

For me theology springs from a divine passion: that is the open wound of God in one's life and in the tormented men, women, and children of the world... but for me theology also springs from God's love for life, the love of life which we experience in the presence of the life-giving Spirit, and which enables us to move beyond our resignation and begin to love life here and now. These are also Christ's two experiences of God, and because of that they are the foundation of Christian theology too: God's delight and God's pain.²

It is not uncommon to hear in everyday human exchange someone using the phrase “that was a real revelation to me” or “that was a religious experience to me.” For the most part, experiences and actual occasions in our lives are ordinary affairs that pass without much consequence or notability by either ourselves or anyone else. We find ourselves limited or boundaried by the world of conventional events that call for normal ego-

¹ Moltmann, *Theology and the Future of the Modern World*, 1.

² Ibid., 3.

functioning of an executive, administrative type. We need to be operating at this level to get along in life's everydayness, but we realize that the natural ego and the world it deals with routinely is not news nor newsworthy. It is the old familiar, and while it is safe and comfortable for us, and brings quiet pleasure and quiet pain, it is experienced and understood by us as not all that absorbing or intimate, and not touching or reaching the more profound dimensions and depths of who we are or the depths of life itself, which is to say, God.

There are, however, human experiences we live through that possess such a density and substantiality of meaning that we refer to them with unusual language, language which often sounds or is religious and points to the transcendent reality of God, who becomes available to us during those moments. In these experiences of another, distinct reality, a reality of the sacred, where God discloses the divine being and essence, we meet God and upon reflection, discover that this encounter with the Holy Other has drawn us closer to the divine heart, and at the same time, moved us beyond our former ego-psyche and its attachments and investments, into the consideration and experience of a multifaceted reality where we not only experience our self as new, but see in the world before us new possibilities for being-in-the-world that we discern are a result of this encounter with the Holy One in the edge experience. This experience of newness where not only God becomes more at hand to us, but where we perceive reality differently than previously and make significant changes in our way of being-in-the-world, has a number of facets to it that the pastor ought to be aware of in the work with laity in the ministry of pastoral care and spiritual direction.

The vulnerability that results from these religious experiences not only makes persons

more sensitive to God's nature and activity in their lives, it tends to make them more prone, if not eager, to divest the ego of identity and reinvest the new self which God seems to be offering them. This means that they become more who they were created to be, more open to God, and more enthusiastic about creativity, aesthetics, personal and social morality, and interpersonal relationships. In short, they become more curious and eager for the fulfillment and beauty they find in being drawn toward a more bounteous self-transcendence through investing who they are in God.

Typically, the beauty and profundity of these experiences establish robust, sweeping, and long-lasting moods and motivations in individuals. When properly interpreted, with the assistance of a minister who understands them and can help draw out their theological meanings, such direction can enable individuals to understand the purpose of these edge experiences as locations for the creative transformation of their individual existing identity into their truest identity and destiny in God.

In this chapter we want to focus upon those enjoyable positive edge experiences of pleasure, ecstasy, and delight, where, typically, we experience God's fullness in terms of its astonishingly pleasant graciousness and value. We do not want to limit a grasp of the pastor's role exclusively to involvement only in situations of existential crisis, understood in terms of those contradictory experiences of death, divorce, or other losses that we are calling negative edge experiences. Those difficult situations are essential to the process of the appropriation of the divine likeness, and they will be certainly addressed here. But before that, we aspire initially to begin our theology with a focus on the reality of the sheer gratuitousness of our existence and those experiences which point to God's pure and

transparent gracious goodness and delight.

The Affirming Edge in the New Testament

One of our basic assumptions is that God is available to us today as God was present to the earliest Christian communities and as their practices and beliefs are open to us from the earliest Christian texts. Ellen Charry postulates that a contemporary pastoral theology needs to argue that dependence upon God's power to build and reform the self is more realistic and freeing, and is, therefore, truer, than the secular insistence on self-formation.³ We hope to present such a theology here.

We have categorized edge experiences in a bipolar fashion for our analysis, noting that one classification of edge experience can be characterized by often agonizing, arduous, emotional, and spiritual difficulties encountered in the oppositional or contradictory nature of this type of experience. We tend to think of these situations as crisis or emergency situations, which call for pastoral intervention that enables stability and finally, reconciliation and transformation of these crisis situations. The other category of edge experience is often left untouched by some models of pastoral theology, which is unfortunate, since the more affirming and enjoyable qualities of these occasions lead some to assume that they really do not call for any type of pastoral intervention.

This model of pastoral theology maintains that it is essential not only to construct a theology of the cross, which deals with the classic problem of theodicy and negation in the life of the laity, but also to provide a heuristic for dealing with the power and beauty of the

³ Ellen Charry, "Reviving Theology in a Time of Change," in *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Jurgen Moltmann*, eds. Miroslav Volf, Carmen Krieg, and Thomas Kucharz (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 125.

affirming edge experiences. The focus on peak experiences such as joy love and faith abound in the New Testament. Authenticity has as much to do with embracing beauty as it does overcoming negation. The creation of self in relation to God is brought about through the dynamic drama of both human highs and lows, since both varieties of occasions bring about this novel vulnerability and sensitivity to which we referred earlier.

Our summit and nadir experiences indicate that the human self is created by God during extraordinary moments, positive and negative. These experiences leave one uneasy, disturbed, and have a shaking quality about them in which the foundations of life are questioned and through which one is deepened and drawn farther into the life of God. Both experiences have the ability to bring about little deaths of the current, given self and cultivate minute births of a newer self with deeper ties to the triune God. This in no way diminishes normal experiences or makes them unimportant, for there is much that is providential in the ordinary plateau experiences of life. These moments, in contrast to the emotionally poignant and intense edge experiences, have a serene character. The tranquillity and harmony of these moments are gifts of God as well, and need a pastoral theology to address them, but, we are not doing that here. We would say, however, in this regard, that the tranquillity of the plateaus of life result from the serenity and security of investing of identity into the living God that is available during times of upheaval. Consequently, for this chapter, we are going to explore the affirmative, pinnacle edge experiences where we discover our own delight in finding and sharing God's delight.

In the New Testament texts, the affirming, pinnacle edge experience of crisis where humans become sensitive and vulnerable to God through delight, beauty, and joy find expression in one form or another on almost every page. These experiences open up a

novel world of meaning which deepen our understanding of ourselves and our world. This shift in meaning has to do with the encounter of the individual with the living God. Meaning's import has to do with a shift in priorities and the acquisition of Christlike character in the shift from given self to functioning as a self in relation to God and its expression in virtue, understanding that this virtue will find expression in a lifestyle consistent with virtue no matter what the details of that lifestyle look like. There is wide openness concerning the expression of these virtues. God grants the relation to us, which gives us the virtues, yet God allows us great freedom in expressing these virtues in the lifestyle that we find most fulfilling to the uniqueness, idiosyncrasy, and self-distinctiveness of who we are as we discover ourselves within a particular social and cultural context of our existence.

The pinnacle edge experience in the New Testament is a pleasurable occasion where we discover that the ordinary, run-of-the-mill sphere of our being and doing is suddenly and wonderfully challenged, jarred, questioned, disoriented, and turned topsy-turvy. The way one had been in the world and the world itself had been mistakenly taken for the one and only possible and real way to be. But the edge experience forces within the psychic world a self-dispute about whether one was actually living the most authentic, human, and fulfilling life. Upon reflecting upon the experience one begins to realize that the manner in which one had been carrying on in the world, was limited, rigid, and even self-absorbed.

A brief look at what a few biblical scholars are saying about the parables of Jesus will be sufficient to make this point convincing. William Herzog argues the point that the parables are essentially subversive speech designed to call into question the oppressive

social systems that dominated the rural populace of Palestine at the time of Jesus' ministry. Jesus' labor parables radically challenged the aristocratic ideology of the haves, who strongly criticized the have-nots and these subversive stories, as a pedagogy of the oppressed, slammed the ideologies used to "blame the victim and keep day laborers separated and paralyzed by self-hatred."⁴ Herzog summarizes his theological and political analysis with the theme that parables are composed of ordinary life events, penetrated by extraordinary moments, where the reign of God was perceived by Jesus and the early church to be in the process of transforming everyday human reality. The parable, as used by Jesus, conveys the incongruity between human political, economic, and social relations springing from life as a human social contract based upon agreement between the haves and the have-nots and from human life and all the dimensions of those social relations lived as a gift from a holy, just, and loving God. In the moment at the edge, brought on by the crisis of the parable, God invades and subverts the present nexus of social relations by demanding and energizing a much more egalitarian, democratic structure for the relations of life. This is because the parable uncovers that God loves everyone equally and not just the haves who, as the power elite in a society, often control the ideology to subvert any notion of the radical equality of persons. The good news for the poor is that they do not have to hate themselves for being poor, nor has God willed their poverty.

Sally McFague maintains that the parables of Jesus are metaphorical theology illustrative of the manner in which the reality of God impinges upon human life. They are

⁴ William Herzog, *Parables as Subversive Speech: Jesus as Pedagogue of the Oppressed* (Louisville: Westminster/John Knox Press, 1994), 79ff.

designed to shock the imagination into a response of openness to God by conveying the significance and ultimacy of the divine reality. She notes that the paradoxical nature of the parable is itself a proper parable of the often paradoxical way in which God encounters human beings. The parable calls them to see the world in novel ways and make new decisions based on the divine encounter. Her work affirms that all the forms of New Testament theological/religious language is ultimately edge language, which both convey and actualize the manner in which God comes to God's creatures.⁵ PHEME PERKINS affirms that parables are typical of religious language in the New Testament and call us to conversion and transformation by making us sensitive and vulnerable to the way God is with the world.⁶ JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN asserts that parables as religious/theological forms and language involve both the moment of "disclosing and perceiving the divine reality and the embodiment of that reality in symbolic form."⁷ The parables, according to Crossan, have three fundamental themes: the advent of God into the world, the reversal and turbulent upheaval of the recipient's world and values, and the empowerment to authentic life and action by this God that Jesus proclaims. All these scholars agree that biblical language has as its fundamental theme dimensions that constitute what we call the edge experience.

⁵ Sally McFague, *Metaphorical Theology: Models of God in Religious Language* (Philadelphia: Fortress Press, 1982).

⁶ PHEME PERKINS, *Hearing the Parables of Jesus* (New York: Paulist Press, 1981), 15.

⁷ JOHN DOMINIC CROSSAN, *In Parables: The Challenge of the Historical Jesus* (Sonoma: Polebridge, 1992).

The parables are an edge experience where the everydayness and ordinary realism of the depicted reality is shattered by a new, eccentric, extraordinary, and often extravagant possibility for human existence and behavior which results from the divine incursion into human affairs. This is true not only in the parables, but throughout the entire New Testament. Even though the forms of the record of the divine incursion differ, the import and result of it are quite similar and revealing about the true state of the affairs of God. We now need to examine various types of affirmative edge experience. Our hope is to explicate one way that these might be understood as moments and places where the divine and the human brush up against each other, producing the creative transformations to the human personality that we believe result from this engagement.

Ecstasy and Mysticism

The experience of God is, as we noted earlier, an impression that we are “set before a transcendent mystery in the sense that the silent infinity of reality which is beyond our control, constantly presents itself to us as a mystery.”⁸ In this rudimentary experience of God, all we can say that we really experience is a rather nebulous, nonthematic experience of the divine life surging through us and in which we participate. God is normally, at first, grasped by us in a rather befuddled way, one characterized as vague and obscure. It is only through the process of living, and reflecting upon the nature of God in the communal experience of the life in the church and its theological reflection that we come to fully understand the nuances and subtleties of the divine action upon us. When we speak of ecstasy and mystical experience we are not suggesting the possibility of any type

⁸ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 1: 114 ff.

of primordial experience of God in the sense of a religious *a priori* preceding all experience. God comes to us in the nexus of history and in the nexus of personal and ecclesiastical life and reflection. Ecstasy and mystical experience are included here as an important part of a model of pastoral care, since they are a customary feature in the universal experience of God. We affirm that they ought to be part of the pastoral assessment process and suggest they be understood in the following manner.

Pannenberg, we noted earlier, postulates that one of the fundamental components of religious experience is facing one's great hunger and longing for *something*, and the pitiable inability of the created things of worldly experience to fill this dissatisfaction. This dissatisfaction is a basic part of our makeup and structures our constitutional openness, ec-centricity, and longing for the experiences of the divine which we call ecstatic or mystical.

In a real way, mystical and ecstatic occasions are fundamental edge experiences, since normally the encounter with the divine in the experience brings about reevaluation and redirection of the course of one's life. Mysticism here is a way of life where one intentionally lives as a mystic communicant in relation to God, expecting God to be present and felt. As one reflects theologically upon this divine feltness, one becomes more intimate with the divine, more conscious of the divine, and more eager to share in the fellowship of the divine trinitarian being of God. In all the events of life God is broadening and deepening us to share the divine life with us. Thus, the pastor ought to be asking persons about these defining mystical and ecstatic spiritual moments, when one feels that he or she is expanding and being expanded beyond the narrow bounds of the former or present self. In a sense, becoming a mystic is really another way of saying that one will

commit oneself to this process of allowing God to help one adopt the divine likeness. Mysticism here is the enjoyment of the investment and involvement in illumination and broadening of the self experience, and, therefore, is a very fulfilling movement in life. It is an edge experience as source, for it brings with it a sense that one has experienced the depths of God and that one has touched or been touched by the most fundamental essence of reality and the divine life. It is sacred occasion as invitation, and also as divine encouragement to be self-expanded by a holy love which compels one to question the nature and depth of one's previous loving.

This questioning can be rather anguished and painful, for when one experiences holy love, one wonders about the former nature of the loving one has done to those with whom one was around and involved. Yet, the final result of mystical experience is a feeling of reconciliation with the former self and way of being with God, with others, and with the created world. One is now more empowered and vulnerable and sensitive to self-transcending love and beauty wherever it exists, and one can more readily surrender to it.

The essence of mysticism is that the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love play out in a sense and feeling of being embraced and undergirded by the divine field of force. Edward Schillebeeckx, in his discussion of mysticism, notes that the result of the graced nearness of God is a discovery of the features of the divine love, and the traces that God has left of the divine life in the being of the individual.⁹ He notes this nearness of God is experienced as embracing not simply our human inwardness but the totality of reality in which we live and in which we exist as an integral component. God is experienced, he

⁹ Schillebeeckx, *Church*, 71.

continues, in the divine transcendent otherness and self-distinction from us in a kind of “not having” God or seeing God through a dark glass, and yet, paradoxically, as remaining within, around, and before us, as friend, companion, guide, and holy God. God is experienced as forgiving, loving, and accepting of us and what we are, yet we also are achingly aware that things and the world and ourselves could be “more.” This restless dissatisfaction is as crucial a part of the mystical ecstatic experience as is the occasion of God’s unconditional love. The “not having” God is as essential as the “having” God. Another way of saying this is that the mystical ecstatic edge experience brings us as individuals to a dramatically more finished, more enhanced, spiritual self-actualization through appropriation of the divine being, and consequently, a more finished, more enhanced, self-experience which is highly pleasurable to us. The edge language in the New Testament related to experiences of mysticism in the gospels and in the letters of Paul is ardent language expressive of deeply felt and deeply satisfying spiritual and emotional self-occasions. This gratification entices individuals both to want to share them in witness and sermon, and continue experiencing them through commitment to the life in the community of faith, where this self-expansion was first occasioned or made conscious.

God seems intent upon human self-production and creation, and humans have typically found this to be a profoundly affirming process. The self of the individual in relation to the divine self becomes aware of its existence and conscious of the difference between itself and God’s self. This difference is experienced as scantiness in the human self, hopefully not or never guilt, but lack. The dissatisfaction associated with this self-scarcity or self-insufficiency nudges one to want a greater self-experience, one that God can graciously

furnish, as well as continue and preserve. We actively participate in this self-appropriation, cooperating with God in self-production and recreating for ourselves a new center for self-existence and action.

This explication of mysticism covers both the present need to properly understand what mysticism is and how we can be faithful to the mystics of the past. Mysticism in many ways is often a reaction to an excessively rational and dogmatic approach to the divine mystery and the nature and destiny of humanity. Yet, for all its seemingly gratuitous and emotional tendencies, which are indispensable features, it is not about social, moral, cultural, theological, or cognitive unproductiveness or impoverishment. On the contrary, mysticism and ecstasy are about abundance, profusion, and improved self-capacity and self-expression in social and interpersonal love.

At the deepest self levels, there is probably much similarity in mystical expressions of faith. However, at the level of human expression in the world and in interaction with the world, we would expect to find great variety in mystical ecstasy. Since pluralism is taken as the norm for all theology today, the pastor needs to be aware that mystical tendencies and mystical expression in the laity will be as richly diverse as life itself. The constants within mystical strains will find expression in vastly different contexts. Some forms of mysticism will be contexted and influenced by experience within nature. Others may take the form of serving the marginalized where God is deeply felt and deeply felt by living theology from examination and sharing the plight of the poor, the disadvantaged, and the victimized. In this strain of mysticism, the victimized concretize the reality of God, and God is found and experienced by encountering the “poor,” who, to a large extent, already possess God.

This ecstasy is *meeting*, as Martin Buber would note, in which an “I” meets a “Thou” through immersion, inclusion and inevitably entanglement in the lives, joys, and frustrations of those at the edges of society.¹⁰ God has self-disclosed as being somewhat of a fringe-dweller, and those on the fringes of society typically possess the vulnerability (and often little else) and sensitivity that is necessary for perceiving the concrete reality of the divine Trinity. While the coming of God is a coming to everyone, it is first, a coming of God to those deprived of life in various forms.

Mysticism contains elements of sheer gratuitousness, of simply being with and being at home with God and of being at home with one’s self, one’s processes, one’s body, others, and one’s world. We affirm it as a comprehension of God’s inexpressible affirmation in love and life which leans toward feeling that all things consist in a unifying, integrating, and reconciling nexus of reality.

Aesthetics and Theology of Beauty

Most people tend to be aware of other worlds represented by religion, poetry, literature, philosophy, art, and beauty, but often they do not know what to make of them, since the forms of consciousness needed to understand the interior realms represented by these disciplines are not being understood or appreciated as necessary for operating in the everyday world. They often remain untapped and incipient, and never really invested with any magnitude of personal identity. The view that one cannot live by bread alone indicates that consciousness must continue to expand from its basic, uniform, undifferentiated state

¹⁰ Martin Buber, *I and Thou*, trans. Ronald Gregor Smith, 2nd ed (New York: Charles Scribner’s Sons, 1958).

into the divine likeness, which calls for the appropriation of its christological structure. This growth into more discriminating, subtle states and shades of consciousness calls for some improved revision, which is hinted at by the repentance, conversion, decision, and transformation motifs reflected in the language of the New Testament texts. As one shifts from given self-modality to self in relation to God modality, a reorientation of the focus and values relating to the direction of one's life and personality naturally follows. This often brings about something of a civil war within one, for the switch of self focal point is not always an easy one (Paul's inner struggle between old and new Adam being at war within his own members in Rom. 7). Yet the rewards for this expanded self are large enough and satisfying enough to make most people not only desire to maintain the gains achieved by fuller differentiation, but to push on for even increased expansion into the divine likeness.

The connection we make between religious experience and the experience and appreciation of beauty and art is the connection that both have in calling one beyond the realm of given self into transcending that psychic modality and developing a more transcendent locus of identity. Both God and the beauty of God's creation which we find expressed in art, call us to simply surrender our given self and allow ourselves to be absorbed, influenced, escorted, and reshaped by the sublime majesty of both God and beauty. Most people grasp this about beauty. Beauty also has weighty power over us and in a very real way calls into question anything in our lives that is shabby and ragged. Beauty in many ways speaks the truth more alluringly and poignantly for most people than

any intellectual or theological argument, as Pannenberg notes.¹¹

As much as theology, ministry, and the pastor's work with the laity in the ministry of spiritual assessment requires serious academic discipline, an overly cognitive approach, such as Pruyser's, has serious limitations. Art and beauty possess great spiritual strength in their ability to give us a pneumatic nudge towards self-transcendence. In Lonergan's theological model, from which we have negotiated a loan, the nuclear assumption is self-transcendence, which means that one lives authentically to the degree that one carries through on investing oneself in a broadening frontier or horizon of life.¹² Art and beauty powerfully symbolize the impotence of humans to find actualization they need which provides a resonant answer to their dissatisfaction and their questioning without restriction. Art and beauty symbolize, at their best, the human longing for the faultless, the finished, the unattainable, the eternal, the infinite, and the holy. Even though there can be alien, obscure, repulsive, and nauseating elements in art, (Picasso's women) they still essentially raise the question of their opposite, the beautiful. Even the ugly, the harrowing, and the offensive raise the question of transcendence and can bring us to the question of God.

Ultimately, perhaps all scientific and artistic questioning is about tracing things back to its origins in Pannenberg's all-determining reality.¹³ Thus, that art and beauty raise, at least, the question of our ingrained alignment to the divine. Further, the artistic

¹¹ Pannenberg, *Introduction to Systematic Theology*, 5.

¹² Lonergan, *Method in Theology*, 104-06.

¹³ Tracy, *Blessed Rage*, 96-97.

temperament, we believe, is closely aligned to the religious temperament in that approaching and reaching for God also demands a certain differentiation of consciousness beyond that used in what we are calling the practical given self mode, one similar to that used in apprehending God. The pull which art and beauty have upon us can be used to help individuals in spiritual formation, understanding that for many the term spirituality often signifies an individual's grasp of beauty and the alluring quality of beauty for the person. Paul notes similarly to his church at Philippi:

Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, . . . think about these things.¹⁴

It would be difficult to summon up adjectives that more embody the qualities sought for in the creation and appreciation of art, and the ability to lead one beyond the present narrows of the given self than this brief exhortation to aim for the graced beauty of life.

While we do not intend to undertake doing a natural theology here, it is important at this point to say that pastoral theology is richer when informed by natural theology. Otherwise it might be somewhat destitute and imprisoned in a ghetto of meagerness, cut off from the beauty, charm, and loveliness of the created order.¹⁵ We noted earlier that the earliest stirrings of theology were probably human reflection upon the created order and its rhythms and cycles. The exploration of natural beauty within the sciences and moral, religious, and self beauty within the arts and humanities can be a crucial means of access for lay persons to the dynamic of self-transcendence.

¹⁴ Phil. 4: 8, 9, RSV.

¹⁵ Polkinghorne, *Faith of a Physicist*, 45.

A theology of the arts, with its themes of transcendence, is one manner in which the pastor can enable the differentiated shift of center from ego functioning to self functioning. The arts provide us with very profound insights, or at least very profound questions, into the nature of reality, humanity, and authenticity. The painter, the novelist, the poet, the musician, the dramatist, and the film-producer, through their imaginative, creative endeavors, are perhaps the most communal and available natural theologians presently working in our society. Due to the process of secularization, many forms of art are currently alienated from their roots and identity in religion. Since religion is seen as something optional, rather than necessary, art can exist apart from the basic questions and depth of life. Moreover, the degrading of art through commercialization, and the role that art ought to play in life, is often seriously obscured or compromised. When it is grasped that the question of art is inextricably linked to the question of who we are and what we should do and hope for, then art can serve the purpose of clarifying self-identity by enabling us to differentiate our consciousness. Art and beauty are central to reinforcing the differentiation of the human self, and provide the means for the emergence of new properties within the self, with expanding arrangements and patterns of intricacy and elaborateness. The pastor might find that precisely assessing art and the parishioner's relation to beauty will be of significant value in working toward a more evolved, differentiated, complex self in the individual lay person.

The Spirit, the Contours, and Lure of Love

Heinz Kohut, who has developed his own unique "self-psychology," notes that in his work with patients, typically, they suffer from what he calls a disturbed self-system. The

disturbance is characterized by a lack of self-esteem and a widespread personality malaise typified by despair, depression, inner emptiness, and profound lack of insight into human emotional operation. He discovered, as he reparented these individuals in the course of his own unique brand of analysis, that as the self is repaired, it begins to manifest healthy qualities of character he calls creativity, humor, and wisdom. These qualities all began to flourish in a newly created matrix of empathy and object love in which an individual blossomed into someone, who, for the first time, not only really experienced her own emotions, because they were truly felt and comprehended for the first time, but came finally to realize that others also possessed and experienced a range of emotion as well.¹⁶

Since Kohut comes out of the Freudian tradition, he believed that each person had a genetically determined amount of instinctual love or loving, creative energy within the structure and flow of the self, but that it is unavailable in some persons because it is misdirected in character disorders due to severe early trauma. Therefore, the loving, real self cannot be expressed in its most creative and mature ways, and sadly, is only available for limited neurotic or narcissistic expression. What is fascinating to the pastor and pastoral theologian in this is, that in every single psychological theory of ego or self or personality, the ability to appropriately feel, accept, and express love is the key element around which the remainder of the auxiliary hypotheses about the personality are built. This is particularly true of the Freudian, neo-Freudian, and humanistic constructions of theories of personality. Not only is the ability to love taken for granted as central, but

¹⁶Heinz Kohut, *The Analysis of the Self: A Systematic Approach to the Psychoanalytic Treatment of Narcissistic Personality Disorders* (Madison, Conn.: International Universities Press, 1989), 296ff.

many of the differences in the self theories seem to be about defining the nature and expression of that which is most creative and most loving. Kohut argues that wrongly cathected love, once freed from the disturbed self-system, provides a new integrity, and direction to the self which allows a fuller, more sublime, and enjoyable self-experience. In short, therapy, according to his model, generally tends to produce integrity and capable moral character where there previously was immature and ineffectual character.

While many self theorists have neither the need nor interest to trace love's origins back any further than the human self, and can be content with their considerations of genetic, evolutionary, social, and familial origins of love and loving, Pannenberg reminds us that the theologian has no such option. Hartshorne writes that religious faith imputes to God at least the kind and degree of power that the world needs as its supreme ordering influence, and further elaborates this idea by asserting that it comes to the same thing to say that the divine power must suffice to enable God to maintain for himself a suitable field of social relations.¹⁷ That affirms the field of the Trinity as a central doctrine to us. David Pailin argues that God's activity needs accordingly, to be conceived as the luring influence of a love which respects the proper integrity and value of others.¹⁸

While we have imaged God as being rather active throughout this project, perhaps we need to reiterate the importance of noting that, as holy love, God is both abundantly and suitably dynamic and receptive toward us. Love cannot be and is not one or the other in

¹⁷ Charles Hartshorne, *The Divine Relativity: A Social Conception of God* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1948), 134.

¹⁸ David Pailin, *God and the Processes of Reality: Foundations for a Credible Theism* (London: Routledge, 1989), 94.

terms of activity. Instead, love is both, as it expresses itself while being conditioned by its other aspects in the nexus of freedom. Love is properly dynamic and receptive. We as Christians who embody this love and find ourselves open to it, will find that our own loving is not only holy and reflective of the other essential nuances of love, but that it is both active love and passive love. As we are approached by the energetic and dynamic beauty in art, we allow it to penetrate, permeate, pervade, and pierce us. In other words, we allow and welcome its grace, truth, and beauty into our being, for only by doing so can we hope to be altered by it. At the same time, we respond to it in a way that coheres with it, unless something is lacking in us.

We are naturally drawn by our created disposition to beauty, truth, grace, and love. If our argument is credible to this point, then our selfhood has its ground, identity, and destiny in love, which means that having no constitutional core identity, our identity is only created and preserved as it continuously transcends itself in concrete acts of loving God, the world, and others, and in ceaselessly being concretely loved by God, the world, and others. This love has its roots in the earliest experience of the child with her mothering one. In the course and process of development, the objects of love become more diverse and the quality of the loving deepens if we keep on track. Hopefully, the child will at an early age also become familiar with the God who transcends parents, teachers, pastors, friends and, hopefully, the child will be taught to see, in the many forms of love, the one love of God, permeating and bracing these other loves, and giving perspective on the manner in which to love others. Being loved and loving are certainly the most positive edge experiences imaginable.

If it is true that other theorists and practitioners who counsel human relations and human relating deal with the concrete reality of loving and being loved, this ought to be no less true with the clergy as they work with the discernment of the field of the Spirit in the actual relationships with lay people. The self as experiencing self is its most ec-static and ec-centric (in Pannenberg's sense) and authentically self-transcending self, when it is being incited and propelled by love of one kind or another. The Spirit's field of emotional and spiritual mood-tone-feeling is that of holy love. When it is love that pervades the self's multidimensional encountering of God, the world and others, in the field of the Spirit, then we affirm that the self is engaged in its fullest range of multidimensionality, in the sense that the self is open to the fullest range of receiving and acting upon God and God's creation. Through love, God attains not only the creation of the world and humanity, but also its enrichment. Unburdened by classical Christian theism which posits an inability of God to be effected by us and who, therefore, is changeless, we can truly experience God in the manner of Berkhof's idea of God as the changeable faithfulness.¹⁹ Hartshorne argued that, excluding Godself, God is still unsurpassable, but God can be enriched by intimacy with his creatures by making the divine being in some way subject to an encounter with people.²⁰ Daniel Day Williams posits that "the analogy of causality excludes from the doctrine of God, his exercise of sheer power to create without becoming involved with the creature, and without being subject to the suffering which follows upon the creature's freedom. Causality without involvement is incompatible

¹⁹ Berkhof, *Christian Faith*, 140-47.

²⁰ Hartshorne, *Divine Relativity*, 34.

with love.²¹ The God who meets us is real in the concreteness of this encounter and, as such, is reactive to us, involved in this encounter with us, animated, and exhilarated by us in our relationship to God. Certainly, the Father, as Jesus portrays the Father in the parables, and the Spirit, as Paul portrays the Spirit in his letters, is involved through the divine being in freedom and love in human joy and suffering, as a God both affecting us and being affected by us.

This course and bearing of love as both dynamic love and receptive love is one of the nuances of loving that the pastor will want to evaluate with each individual lay person in the course of spiritual direction. Michael Welker confirms our line of thought here by noting that the Spirit as loving power brings individuals into community and, that having brought them together, also influences their communal loving by a polar movement.²² The complexity of the Spirit's loving plays out in the community as both free self-withdrawing love and free self-giving love for the benefit other creatures.

Pastors will recognize that, while relationships are complex and involve more than this dynamic, notwithstanding this, unhealthy relationships within the community are clearly and most significantly characterized by an imbalance between freedom and love. Love without the ability to self-withdraw quickly overwhelms other's freedom and soon becomes stifling, controlling, overbearing, and toxic. Freedom without loving remains only theoretical loving or wishful loving, that is not activated and, therefore, loving that cannot

²¹ Daniel Day Williams, *The Spirit and the Forms of Love* (Lanham, Md.: University Press of America, 1981), 128.

²² Welker, *God the Spirit*, 228ff.

be called loving, since it is never concretized in actual occasions and human events. This kind of love cannot be enriching for anyone, since it is non-emotional and non-relational, aloof love, which is a complete contradiction.

The dynamic of free self-withdrawal creates space for individuality within community and relationship. It is a quality of loving characteristic of God's loving which finds expression in us when we can appreciate the fact that while each person has a basic theological and anthropological disposition toward God, this disposition will unfold and come to fruition in a unique manner. Loving can only be enriching and nudge one toward the beauty of the divine likeness when, like God's loving, it does no violence, but only good, creates a climate, and infuses relationships where interiority and selfhood flourish. In order for people to be who they are and develop as they ought, free self-withdrawal is indispensable.

The flourishing creativity of the church too, as a community as diverse, multicultural, and multifaceted as it has always been and as the Creator entices it to be, depends equally upon this quality. This is particularly important because of the strong conformist and conventionalist trends within some local churches. The church is not a monoculture, but rather a place where people are loved for who they are in their creative uniqueness and expressive diversity.

Thus, love in its self-withdrawing aspect is not to be understood as a deprivation, forfeiture, or abandonment of love and loving relationship. The withdrawal is balanced with self-giving and always done with affirmation of the free development and joy in the unique possibilities for divine likeness that the other person possesses. Also, it is love that

understands that persons need time alone to get in touch with their own unique, interior makeup and that further, they ought to be encouraged to develop themselves along the constitutional pattern which exists. The self-boundaries of love need to be permeable, allowing others and yet, at the same time, containing, and giving identity and direction to the reality of each self in its actual relationship. The loving self needs to be active in self-giving, but also active in self-containment, as well as permeable in order to allow other selves, and indeed, God's trinitarian self, to engage one's own self-core.

In this way, therefore, the self gains selfhood and the ability to actualize self-transcending love through the action and reaction of God's, others' and one's own loving in the complex network of human relating. Love is not only active. It is receptive, affected, stirred, and influenced by love. It allows and encourages the other, gives space and opportunity for the other to be and to love, and is mobilized love in both its passive and permeable aspects. Love cannot be confused with smothering over-control, nor can it be understood as exclusively passive and receptive, but rather, must take the form of all of these dynamics in its actual occasions and personal events.

The permeability of the self-boundaries is a crucial aspect of the agapic loving that needs to infuse all *philia* and *eros*, the types of loving in which we are most invested and engaged. Human love needs to mirror those permeable self-boundaries in the kind of loving created by the field of the Father, Son, and Spirit. While we see clear self-distinction between the three persons of God, we also see their ability to affect, influence, and cooperate with each other in love. The Father is open to the Son and Spirit, the Son to the Father and Spirit, and the Spirit to the Father and the Son.

This implies, we argue, permeable self-boundaries within the Godhead. Indeed, what

would be the point of theology or prayer if God's self-boundaries were not permeable and God's self were unaffected by our joy, beauty, sorrowing, and our reaching for God. One cannot help but be struck with Jesus' active forms of loving, but equally one is equally impressed with Jesus' openness to the love and loving expressions of others. Similarly, he was often joyfully astonished at someone's ability to love just as he was deeply saddened at the ability of others not to love or to fail to understand the loving import of his sermons, teaching, and ministry. The self which is created in the intimacy with God is the self that is reflected by the intimate fellowship between the persons of the Trinity. This seems to be a permeable self, a core of loving, creative actuality and identity in which personal psychic substance moves and which also allows the reception of other's personal psychic substance. A loving self must be a permeable self. In fact, love and permeability of the self go hand in hand. Permeability of self-boundaries means the self is accessible, open, and vulnerable. It means that one makes an effort to self-communicate and make oneself understood. God self-demonstrates in the divine self-disclosure making deity transparent, even while remaining mysterious. This transparency reflects God's accessibility and openness to us. This openness draws us in, for the divine being is lovingly intriguing.

As curious, open creatures, we are drawn to God because of this divine vulnerability, for only vulnerability allows us to feel safe enough to risk a relationship.

Fecund Outgrowth of the Spirit

Michael Welker posits that the term "fruits of the Spirit" describes the atmosphere and environment which condition both individual psyches and the community.²³ The Spirit

²³ Ibid., 248.

creates a relational mood and milieu which is both characteristic of the divine likeness, and affords people the natural and appropriate ambience in which God can bring about the divine likeness within the human self. The gifts and the fruits are the subtleties of love, hope, and faith. This is an acceptable assertion, since the opposite qualities would be violence, contentiousness, despair, aggressive self-assertion, and a refusal to be available to or accepting of others. In fact, Paul registers that exactly these kinds of negative qualities (works of the flesh, Gal. 5: 19-21; Rom. 1:29-31) are ordinarily and constantly outcomes that result from loss of connection with God, and qualities which are quite antithetical to the spiritual milieu God seems intent upon creating, as a matrix for human life, human love, and human work. In this sense the action of the Spirit is to create an environment within persons, between persons, and surrounding persons that facilitates the person and the community at the same time in the appropriation and unique diverse expression of the divine likeness in the complex vicissitudes, intricacies, and kaleidoscopic variables which constitute human personalities.

The Spirit works to set the timbre and disposition for life. The Spirit is appropriately subtle, complex, and nuanced to fit human life. People and relations flourish in the concrete matrix of the spiritual tone and mood set up by the public field of force of the Spirit of the God. Welker asserts:

the gifts of grace, the charisms, are elements of the force field of the Spirit, and at the same time they themselves constitute force fields, through which the action of the Spirit is realized and spread in the finite and shared life of human beings.²⁴

²⁴ Ibid., 240.

The Spirit opens up a field of force in whose matrix individuals are grounded and can avail themselves of and become even more invested in, intimate with, and entrenched. This increases their enjoyment and welfare and the enjoyment and benefit of others. Individuals in the church ought to be tuned in to the constitutive elements within this field, specifically these charisms and gifts of grace. Since they constitute the essence of God and God's activity, these same charisms ought to emerge in and endow people, play out in relationships, and sensitize individuals and the community to the reality of the Spirit's presence among them. The individuals, to some extent, ought to possess these charisms and spawn and instigate them in relationship to others. Therefore, lay individuals ought to become constituent components of, and an element or at least a catalyst in the vanguard of this field of force.

Paul lists these complexly structured elements which form a nexus within the field of God's love variously as love, joy, peace, patience, kindness, goodness, faithfulness, gentleness, and self-control (Gal. 5: 22), or purity, knowledge, forbearance, kindness, the holy Spirit, genuine love, truthful speech, and the power of God (2 Cor. 6: 6-7), or righteousness, godliness, faith, love, steadfastness, and gentleness (1Tim. 6: 11), or righteousness, joy, and peace in the holy Spirit (Rom. 14: 17) or finally as faith, hope, and love (1 Cor. 13). These complex elements of the divine field of force compose the character of the Spirit and endow the person and community of the Spirit. These enable them to enter into the field of the Spirit and further sensitize others, the community, and the world to the matrix and array of the virtue and characteristic elements of the divine field of concrete relations.

Life in the Spirit and the community of the Spirit is what we understand by entrusting oneself to an authentic identity and destiny of self-transcendence. In this respect, the Spirit and field it creates within and between, is a crucial peak edge experience. It tends to grace us with its constituent elements and through the new humanness we receive a capacity for a brimming and enjoyable self-experience. The Spirit continues to encourage us toward an even more cherished participation in and appropriation of the divine field of being.

Every individual creates a spiritual and moral climate around them as does every church or group of people. God too, creates an atmosphere in the Spirit. Perhaps this data can enable pastors to help people evaluate the climate that they create between themselves and others. The above-discussed field of complex elements ought to be core elements of the local community's mood. The climate in the church which results ought not simply to be pleasant or tolerant. We affirm that if the church is attempting and succeeding, no matter how minimally, that climate ought to be a place where Christian character is being joyfully forged in everyone, to some conspicuous extent.

Faith and Hope

We postulate that part of the pastoral, spiritual discernment process ought to be concerned with two additional compositional components of the Spirit's field of force, namely, faith and hope. As the Spirit creates a self-transcending environment, and as the Spirit is validated in the person through Christian love and loving, so we would expect the presence of faith and hope as fundamental features of the religious life and thus, features for pastors to explore with laypersons in the process of caring for them.

Although the word faith is complex, for the purpose of this pastoral theology and pastoral caring, we follow Lonergan's argument, which maintains that faith is the

knowledge born of religious love. It is love seeking awareness, understanding, and precision. We experience God and God's love. We then feel curious and obligated as rational creatures to understand and make judgments about that love in terms of being intelligent lovers, moral lovers, sophisticated, aesthetic lovers and familial, social, and communal lovers. That is, we experience God's love and we ponder and then design the manner in which we are called to love and how that constitutes the authentically human and good life. Faith, then, is the thinking-through of the questions concerning the reality of God. Our self-transcending is always fragile and uncertain. We never fully possess it. The process of our evolution into what we are to become is pervaded with a great amount of tension, struggle, and insecurity. This is true even of a life lived as evolving in and through the process of loving and being loved by God. Further, there is tension between self-love, self-assertion, and self-transcendence, and these tensions continually present themselves to us and continually need to be resolved. As the world changes, we find old ways of loving make little sense and need to be revised. This occurs at both the local church and the individual level.

The ideal of human authenticity is never some serene, pure, and secure possession. It is rather a difficult labor. Paul compared this process to the difficult, painful labor involved in childbirth. It is the labor involved in the removal of self-investment from inauthenticity and less human and less loving ways of being-in-the-world. Part of one's expanding edge involves the removing of blocks to faith and faithful loving expression of character. The idea that the appropriation of the divine likeness is done through some tranquil, homogeneous, and unimpeded course of developmental self-elaboration is

contrary to the tough reality of this process.

Improvement, elaboration, and even continuation in this process are difficult. Many people will give up in frustration and drop out of the process. Others go through the motions in a superficial manner and never really change. Others give up even attempting to stay committed to the process. The pastor will find that some persons will not attempt the process for various reasons and others who believe that they have already completed the process. Appropriating a more fully human authentic self is the primary challenge and joy of the Christian life, yet some persons will be less than eager to engage the pastor at all during a one-on-one talk. Everyone will find the process of self-transcendence an often frustrating and slippery course. There are many fits and starts to this dynamic. There is progress in the process, but sometimes there is stagnation, slump, relapse, regression, and periods of lukewarmness and backsliding.

These moments in the process are understood as normal, paradoxical intervals of varying duration called desolations, or if they last longer, dark nights. They can serve as moments of pause, regrouping, recuperation, and rest from the gains made in the process. This process toward faith is precarious and troublesome. Some individuals might interpret the idea of faith as theology or interpretation of dogma and doctrine. The term faith here has connotations about how one goes about apprehending, experiencing, discerning, and finally acting in light of the love of God. Faith is related to self-transcendence.

Thus, faith suggests that the pastor engage the lay person in a form of praxis that is relevant to that individual's situation in life. In other words, the pastor should assist the lay person to think theologically in a way in which the New Testament texts correlate to each person's life and suggest authentic possible modes of being-in-the-world and self-

transcendence according to his or her own unique predicament. Each person's faith should be personal as well as political and social. Religious experience for the Christian touches all aspects of life and God ought also to be perceived as everywhere available and involved. Many lay person's suffer from compartmentalization of religious life and so God has become for them distant, unrelated, and relatively beyond recollection. Thus our notion of faith or belief has to do with the existential level of purposeful, determined, conscious effort of thought and will.

In terms of hope we see this virtue as future oriented. This gift opens humanity up to the future and gives them a much broader, deeper, expansive horizon to life and living than they would have without it. Particularly in our own era, when doubt, nihilism, cynicism, and skepticism are so much a part of people's functioning, and where today we generally see people often attributing ulterior motives to other persons' motives and actions, hope can become a difficult entity to discover even in the church, the community of hope.

We relate hope to the quality of human relationship with God and with close others, believing that fertile and reliable, mature relationships can produce a buoyant hope allowing persons the climate to tackle some of the current societal problems and issues, understanding that God will be there in the future as God is in the present. Hope is a necessary quality of character the pastor needs to explore with the laity, because part of hope is related to the God who vows to meet them at the affirming or opposing edge in the future. In terms of opposing edge experiences, hope means that God will be there for them as God was in the past. It means they can grieve and suffer as those with hope.

Hope keeps the end of life open and the personality open in an eager expectation of more love and life and a better connectedness to God and an enhanced self-experience.

Affirming edge situations more easily bring hope through the sheer magnitude of pleasure within them. Without hope, human functioning is diminished and one feels cornered, crowded, and suffocated as though one were running out of opportunity, possibility, and perhaps even life itself. The Christian gospel seems to imply and promise a much finer, deeper, self-experience through the reality and actual occasion of continued divine meeting. Hope means that human prospects are considerably good, when lived in openness to the divine field.

CHAPTER 8

The Opposing Edge Experience

Novel Horizons Through Negation

Part of the human experience and human being-in-the-world is the fact that each of us is limited by the parameters of those elements that frame our own unique selves. These elements form each person's unique horizon. The horizon of each person is his or her vantage point. Each human being possess similarities to others, but also a great deal of idiosyncrasy and is something of a singularity. The pastor will encounter as many different horizons in working with the laity as there are lay persons. Whatever a person's horizon is, that is precisely where the pastor will encounter the person when a pastoral intervention becomes appropriate.

In order to fulfill one's destiny of self-transcendence, a destiny to which this project is committed, we affirm that one needs to progress in the process of life. We defined this progress in several ways, but essentially we are thinking of the appropriation of the divine likeness where the natural, given self is divested of identity and a self in relation to God is consciously and resolutely developed that reflects the qualities and virtue of God's character in a unique manner in each individual person. There can be self process without progress, but this amounts to what we are calling inauthenticity and estrangement from one's truest destiny of appropriating the divine likeness.

The pastor is present in the community of faith, according to this design, to suggest to the community and the individuals in the community that they can disregard the movement toward self-transcendence only at the price of stagnation and a considerably inferior and mediocre self-experience and deficiency and barrenness in relationships. Human beings,

we affirm, are inevitably lured and drawn toward the divine in all the experiences of life, those affirmative peak experiences as discussed in the last chapter, the more ordinary, placid, run-of-the-mill plateau experiences, where, commonly, less intense emotion is felt, and that tend to possess a rather more everyday, casual, serene sweetness and lack the elements of strong emotion typical of both kinds of edge experiences, and finally, a third type of human experience, which is the subject of this chapter. These are contradictory experiences that tend to be quite emotionally traumatic in nature.

Nothing can obstruct the movement toward self-transcendence like these existential experiences at the boundary of ordinary life that we are calling oppositional edge experiences. We call them oppositional edge experiences, because initially we experience them as events that are incompatible with our well-being. To interpret these experiences only in light of their initial emotional impact, even though their impression might be both jolting and significant, is not enough for our pastoral enterprise. While there are stages of complex emotional reactions that many of these contradictory experiences produce and while the working through of these stages often constitutes a share in some of the caring and counseling that a pastor provides, our model hopes to supply a theological interpretation and the provision of a Christian philosophical framework for understanding the nature of the opposing edge experience.

The proclivity toward self-transcendent growth is significant in us, for that is our destiny. However, this movement is precarious and needs to be nurtured and encouraged. As individuals, self-transcendence means we move in ever-widening circles of life and that our current horizons broaden and deepen, and that we discover our identity and destiny in

repudiating past horizons for more human and authentic horizons. This is what is meant by the language of the New Testament when it hints at the human need for the reality implied with words like repentance and conversion. Self-transcendence is conversion and it is the passage from one's present horizon to a horizon which more fully embodies the idea of human authenticity. This means something happens to the present location of the self that encourages it to continue in its reaching outward. Little deaths must occur to the natural, given self, in which the old self-identities are broken down for new self-identities that become the new self. This results from a deeper investment of the self's identity in God's being. The strength of self that comes from the divine enables one to appropriate more of the divine being. God grants us this gift of the divine being, by furnishing us with new horizons that convert the former moral, intellectual, aesthetic, relational, and religious horizons which we were, and possessed, and allows us to grow more into the divine likeness and the christological configuration of our self-identity.

These new horizons or transformations of the old self to a new self do not happen naturally. During plateau periods, we do not ordinarily sense much growth, but rather enjoy the elaboration that came through prior positive and negative edge experiences. The main catalysts for self-transcendence are the edge experiences. They can break down the old self and create in their place new self-boundaries characterized by progress in maturity and christological humanity. The affirming edge experiences occasion growth through beauty, joy, and pleasure, while the opposing edge experiences engender increase through pain, discomfort, and suffering. God facilitates growth through the vulnerability and suppleness which the edge experiences bring to the current self.

The self is liberated from its former modes of being and being conscious into a richer

state of operating. The idea of the self is not a useful theoretical fiction spun out of the web of mental events within our psychic field. The self-identity that we possess is not simply the feeling of our self-continuity ceaselessly remembered or the occasion of our self as our intuition of selfhood, although that is a part of our self-experience. More importantly, our self-experience, when tied into the self of God, possesses a continuity and strength of identity that can transcend imperfect and faulty memory and relate our identity more deeply into the flow of being by not allowing our transformative self-transcending process to be overly susceptible to simple and fragile dependence upon our memory, moods, brain chemistry, and self-awareness.

Our experiences and memories constitute our identity at a certain level, but our deepest self is the self not created and related to the ephemeral and ambiguous circumstances of life. The New Testament suggests our deepest self is that self in its connectedness to the living God. Consciousness and the experience of the self is as fundamental an experience of life as is the physical reality, space, numbers, time, matter, energy, and mass. Relatedness to God is as important to our experience of our continuity of our full self as God is to the continuation of our self in its transformation into God's eternity at our resurrection, where God fabricates a replica of who we are.

Our perception and experience of the self ought to be a consciousness and experience of the self as a self which has experienced the singularity of our constitution and horizon, and as being created by God. During the process of life, we also ought to experience being transformed, through our own cooperation with God, into something much more than we are now. Although very much in continuity with that given self, the new self seems at

times so surpassing that former self who we were, that we have less investment in our past self than in our present and future self, since we believe this process of self-transcendence will continue, and we will grow more into the divine likeness than we have already. That is both our experience and our hope.

The idea of Christian perfection, an important Wesleyan notion informing this project, indicates that we as creatures continue in our movement towards better self-experience, in which we more completely embody the ideal of being in love with God in an unrestricted manner. Our identity and destiny lie in the process of this movement, not in attainment of the goal. This is the reason that this pastoral theology is only a heuristic model.

We maintain that the precise goal of humanity is, for the present, somewhat unclear, although the resurrection of Jesus gives us great hope and allows us to venture some extrapolation about ourselves and our future destiny based upon the historical reality of this fact. The exact goal is at this moment indistinct. At the conclusion of our present life we are going to die, to a greater or lesser extent, with our lives as unfinished symphonies, our injuries still untreated, family and emotional issues unresolved, creative dreams and schemes not complete, appropriation of the divine likeness unattained, unable to fully love and appreciate beauty, still somewhat burdened by our ego-centricity, with many incomplete potentialities, possibilities, and proposals unexplored, and secret hopes, fantasies, and dreams unfulfilled. But that might be all right, if we understand that this life is only an overture to a much fuller life, and the fullness that we occasionally do experience is only a foretaste of what is to come. This world and our bodies will devolve and run down. But God is such that we have an altogether reasonable hope, reflected in those earliest Christian texts, that God will remember us and the precise

and unique pattern-identity-original of physical-mental-data-being who we are, and will replicate us in some fresh setting of God's personal preference in God's consummate act of resurrection.¹

Therefore, we posit that opposing edge experiences are opportunities for the breakdown and modification of previous self-identity which, through distress and adversity, encourage the assimilation of a more profound self-identity by drawing the self into a deeper relationship with God. These adverse edge experiences break down the old self in numerous ways, often calling for an elucidation and commentary upon previous values and assumptions which we operated from and held dear, and often forcing us to grapple on a deep emotional level with some issue that we never had any opportunity or reason to deal with before. They also might include a serious thinking through of issues that we were unaware existed or a final confrontation to our own naïveté about enigmatic self-fictions.

Whatever the specifics of the edge situation, in each one we are often confronted with the limitations our own horizon of meaning, the limitation of our own wisdom, and ability for helping others to adjust to their own adverse edges. Or, they might confront us with the limitations of our understanding the reason for such experiences, the paucity of our thinking, our powerlessness, and our inability to control or check such experiences, or to prevent them from recurring to those we love. While the upbeat, affirming edge experiences expand our self-boundaries through pleasurable grace, these adverse edge experiences expand us through pained grace. These entail assimilating novel revelations

¹ Polkinghorne, *Faith of a Physicist*, 106-23.

about the nature of things which adversity hands to us. We can surely ignore any lessons or deeper insights into the nature of these experiences and the manner in which God uses them to draw close to us and draw us out. Perhaps the saddest of all pastoral caring undertaken by any minister has to do with death and losses, and the failure of individuals to incorporate these deaths and losses into their present horizon, enabling them to breakdown narrowness and rigidity of self, or paucity of empathy.

A striking growth spurt often can take place through the sorrow of these moments. They ought to bring about a more holy quality to the self. Pastors have the opportunity to do more than simply assist people through the stages of grief at the time of a loss. The pastor ought to be aware of the stages of grief and monitor them with persons under her care according to the stages and their expressed normal idiom. But as one entrusted to the dynamic of self-transcendence as the most vital movement within the human soul, beyond assisting with adjustment, pastors can assist persons beyond the present self-location into a more authentically graced and loving way of being, one hopefully that mirrors a deeper connection to the life of God in a manner consistent with the individual's own distinctive self.

We will now look at some representative opposing edge experiences and how the pastor might provide the means of assimilation of these experiences into the identity of the person in a way that is consistent with the possible divine ends.

Sin as the Trial and Anguish of Non-identity

The topic of sin is an important one for us for several reasons. Yet this nuclear concept has fallen into disuse because it tends toward legalism and moralism, and the

attending reduction of the concept to sins or sinful acts, or in particular, observed and observable sinful acts. On top of this, over-zealous moralizers are often perceived as intolerant and, therefore, associated with an range of unpleasant attitudes and behavior indicated by the words conformist, rigid, puritanical, austere, ascetic, fanatical, prudish, and self-righteous. Also, the current pluralistic context of theology makes us aware of the relativity, cultural conditioning, and various options for lifestyles that often make the idea of sin sound simplistic, archaic, and smacking of convention and narrow-mindedness.² We live in a world and a church of multifaceted human meanings.

On top of this, the concept of sin as sinful acts has undergone a dramatic revision, because the present situation concerning actual moral failure often finds its best explanations not in some wanton exercise of human freedom, but instead in a neurotic, narcissistic, or immature psychological or sociological rationale. In addition, the industrialization and technologicalization of the world has brought new standards by which people operate and measure other individuals. These include efficiency, reliability, economic viability, and the amount of investment one puts into the particular institution one is employed by, and the way in which one's efforts preserve the life of that institution.

The problem becomes how the pastoral theologian and the pastor deal with the present occasion, and bring serious theological interpretation to modern lay persons, given the reality concerning the serious weakening and deterioration in individuals of any impression or perception of the actuality of sin. In the past, the idea of sin has been misused, for even the earliest church struggled against legalists, conventionalists, and

² Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality*, 15-22.

moralizers, as well as with those on the other ethical extreme, the antinomian secularizers. However, those earliest communities seemed to feel that the appropriate sensibility about sin was an essential part of the Christian life in community and that the concept was important for the definition of Christian self-understanding, and the concept of the process involved in self-transcendence.

We want to explore how any edge negative reality implied by the sense of sin can be utilized in the process of self-transcendence, without lapsing either into secularist antinomianism, or legalism. Christian faith still presumes the reality of sin, and the New Testament texts seem to indicate that the unmasking of human sin is essential to any effort to be humanly authentic. Thus, it internally endures for this project as an advantageous edge concept. To ignore or explain away the reality of sin would be to extricate a reality essential to the sound reasoning and coherence of the gospel. We cannot abandon it as too problematic.³

We do need, however, to discuss it without producing consciences or super-egos or other internalized or introjected moral structures full of neurotic self-aggression typical of any constrictive navel-gazing piety which encourages any psychologically sabotaging guilt consciousness. The aim of the discussion of the topic of sin needs to be undertaken so as not to subdue self-development, for the reality of sin as a human adverse edge experience is tied to human self-transcendence. The unawareness of sin in the secular mind ought not to blind us to the reality that it exists. Yet, it is a concept which is best understood in light of the knowledge of the impinging reality of God in the persons of the

³ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2: 231-38.

Holy Trinity. So we want to look at the way in which the awareness of sin leads to human self-transcendence, and the manner in which the pastor might utilize it in helping persons to seize upon and assimilate the divine likeness.

We have ruled out the usefulness of the idea of moralistic, penitential modes for understanding sin as a failure to comply with divine commandments. This only tends to produce an emotionally burdensome occasion of self-alienation and self-aggression. In keeping with our anthropological assumptions, the problem of sin points to the real tension between the dialectic reality of the pull of ego-centeredness and narcissism and the pull toward God and development of self in relation to God and the self-transcending core of identity that this latter movement produces. In Paul Pruyser's model of diagnostic variables, he asserts that sin is concern with the perception and recognition of acts of sin and believes that the emotion 'sorriness' is a good indication which any act of confession might be authentic.⁴

We believe this is an unlucky trend for reasons stated earlier. The pastor might be able to trace an individual's real or imagined acts of sin back to the real issue in the concept of sin, namely, that of inauthentic ego-centricity over against authentic self-transcendence. There is always regression and slipping back into sin manifested in sinful acts and, therefore, times when, as Pruyser notes, emotions like remorse, regret, sorrow, and guilt might appropriately appear and seriously need to be addressed. Yet our model postulates not falling into the trap of encouraging a trivialization of the profound nature of the Christian doctrine of sin through encouraging a discussion or concern with social

⁴ Pruyser, *Minister as Diagnostician*, 71-73.

blunders, peccadilloes, personal shortcomings, or lapses into the previously mentioned shapes in which the discussion of sin becomes clouded with moralistic or neurotic overtones.

With respect to individual sins, the pastor ought to be discouraging persons from thinking in an individualistic, atomistic fashion. The pastor would be more productive by reminding the individual of the communal and structural nature of sin and the corporate failing of the Christian community of faith of which he or she is a part of to address and deal adequately with the social problems and issues of the day.

Our model maintains that the idea of sin needs to remain fundamentally a religious idea and not simply a moral one. The need is for pastors to approach the doctrine of sin in a manner which avoids the above pitfalls and still achieves transformation in the community of faith.⁵ This cannot be achieved by creating self-alienation through the creation of an enduring self-consciousness of personal sinfulness. This would be generating Christian self-identity through defeat and self-repudiation, which is ultimately inauthentic and self-alienating and so is an incorrect way to fashion any new sense of identity that the Christian gospel undeniably calls us to appropriate.

The human edge situation addressed by the concept of sin has more to do with a portrayal of the general human predicament than with ideas and concepts concerning ethical and moral criteria. By avoiding emphasis upon moral norms and acts of sin as the root and expression of sin, one might avoid moral relativity and forms of religious neuroticism. Another serious theological problem with the understanding of sin as moral

⁵ Pannenberg, *Christian Spirituality*, 25-27.

norms is the tendency towards pretense of virtue and self-righteousness that produces a stance in the person that refuses to see his or her own complicity in sin and refuses solidarity with the oppressors who themselves have become the unconscious expression of the ruinous energy of sin. All have sinned and come under the destructive vitality of sin, and this is, for us, reflected in the reality that all humans are born without a core identity and must struggle to constantly appropriate one through acts of self-definition.

Following Pannenberg's use of sociological and anthropological data, particularly that of George Herbert Mead and, hopefully, in line with a coherent interpretation of Christian texts, human sin is best a theological utterance to describe the reality and phenomenon of intrinsic human non-identity and the search for meaning and fulfillment in identity that all humans are set upon at birth, a task and a challenge which confronts them throughout the life cycle and calls them to face identity-seeking with seriousness, intelligence, and openness.⁶ The puzzle of sin is the problem of human self-identity. For the Christian pastor, sin confronts the laity in non-identity by resignation, or unconsciousness toward the essential human problem of identity or in the spurious and inauthentic choice of framework for understanding human identity and destiny.

The enigma of sin as an edge experience is the quandary of failing to distinguish and recognize one's own most authentic identity and destiny in the person of Jesus Christ. Sin is a willful or clueless closing to the process of letting God grace one with the divine nature and likeness. Being open to God means several things. First, it means, that the reality of God as the all-determining real power over everything, is affirmed by the

⁶ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2: 238-50.

individual and that, this benevolent, superior power the church calls God, is understood as the basis for all other reality as Creator. Further, the Christian self, as a theological self, is primarily and ultimately a self in relation to God, created for intimacy with God, and this reality called God has an active, personal character best understood in the language of holy love. This power is both dynamic and personal, as the term loving Father hints at, and this superior power also has a flexible but ultimately faithful character inclined tenderly and graciously toward humans and the creation. Also, the humanity accomplished in Jesus Christ is decisive for comprehension of the presence of God in human life. Further, this divine reality can be discerned as awakening and exciting us toward a greater self-transcendence. This process is finally a call to begin renewing and redeeming the world and society.

The nature of sin indicates that to a greater or lesser extent the inferences and behavioral consequences of the historical mystery Christianity proclaims in terms of the divine involvement in the actual affairs of human existence fails to materialize in the concrete reality of the self. Sin means significant evidence of faith such as fruits, gifts, and theological virtues in the process of self-expression has not materialized. Faith is the manner human life manifests as a lived response to the divine reality and how this response serves as the basis for all other assumed identities which modern individuals appropriate or have thrust upon them. Sin indicates a deficiency to secure and fasten adequately upon a Christological identity, and to integrate the other identities which result from the numerous social, cultural, political, class, economic, gender, familial, and vocational roles which impinge upon and the fundamental identity as self in relation to God. Sin is letting secondary identities to become the primary, constitutive identity of self. As such, sin

resists the actual nature of things and the transformative thrust into the divine likeness. It is investment in meanings and definitions which slip from grasping the flow of God in the divine, creative metamorphosis of the world and the human self.

While an argument can be made that self-transcendence is possible wherever persons are committed to the common good in any pursuit, such as science, literature, art, or politics, for the clergy who work with the laity, the movement of self-transcendence ought to be a more conscious appropriation of the dynamics of God in the historical life of individuals. This movement of self-transcendence is neither mechanical nor entirely involuntary, but must be willed as task and accepted as gift. The clergy ought to nurture this dynamic, as it is prone not only to roam askew into nonidentity and inauthenticity, but even when unswerving in moving toward God in Christ, it is subject to stagnation and other reversals due to it being a sometimes fragile dynamic in the human self.

The most important negative edge experience is any experience in which the nature of personal identity is called into question. Erikson tended to argue that identity and any struggle for identity was primarily worked through during adolescence when one chose a profession or vocation to which one would commit one's life and make one's life work.⁷ This analysis is oversimplified. It fails to address the existential reality that human identity is perpetually being called into question to take newer forms of authenticity, by the dynamics of life itself, and constantly needs to be nourished and consolidated. Identity is a complex multidimensional occasion and takes more into account than transition

⁷ Erik Erikson, *Identity: Youth and Crisis* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1968).

through psycho-sexual (Freud), psycho-social (Erikson), or moral (Kohlberg) life-task choices, passages, and stages. These are noteworthy for grasping the rhythm of human life. But in addition these stages must be understood and integrated into the totality of the process of self-transcendence. This divine dynamic is a gift of God's self. It generates and gives composition to the self. Ultimately, it stabilizes and preserves the human self in transformative love.

Since the eternal and infinite God has predicated our existence, this makes our identity one of undeniable and inextricable relationship to that deity. So to ground our existence in some created reality is to quite miss the main point of our existence. The more we try to avoid God, the less we become who we are. Humans are prone to try to establish their own identity and try to create their selves through self-projects. But these are often based upon arbitrary or capricious, finite focal points which involve some goal of self-fulfillment. Often these goals hint at self-transcendence as with modern secular psychologies, which keep the transformative language, but drop the God-talk.⁸ We embrace any effort to define the common good. Yet, as Christian, we posit that human identity comes into existence through the pursuit of not simply the pursuit of the good, although that is certainly admirable, but rather, in the seeking and finding of the living God, who is our unrivaled good. Sin is the self-attempt to structure the self and the attempted rooting of identity in that which is not God.

Thus, the pastor ought to advocate an exploration of the perceived manner in which

⁸ Gregory Baum, *Man Becoming: God in Secular Language* (New York: Herder and Herder, 1970).

lay persons consciously or unconsciously delineate and signify self-identity. Congruence ought exist between the core Christian identity and the other subordinate or derivative identities which come into existence and are perceived by the person as an essential part of the self. The pastor ought to be a midwife to the “more” that the individual understands she or he is being called to be. A result of the many compulsory and arbitrary social roles being invariably and often grimly thrust upon us is our tendency to comprehend and define ourselves by what we do. This inclination is linked with the fact that this is the manner in which a secular culture such as ours defines people. Others are regularly defining us in such a manner, and this process is not without its dehumanizing effect on all human psyches.

We posit that creaturely existence, which is willed by God, goes astray right at the beginning, when we begin the process of misnaming and relabeling each other and ourselves in a process of mistaken identity. That is, in believing and acting toward each other as though we were, ultimately, these arbitrary and derivative social roles rather than understanding ourselves primarily as creatures of a God, we make an unlucky error.

In Genesis, man and woman name the animals and the other created things of the world, but they do not name themselves. Their names are given to them. This ancient text points us to the reality that it is God who establishes our creaturely identity, and that all other roles and identities are auxiliary and subordinate. We ought to recall that the word role comes to the English language from the dramatic arts. It hints at pretending and appearance. A role is something we play, not necessarily something we are created to be. A role can become what we are created to be. But only through a serious process of reflection and integration of the role into our created identity, where we establish, as much

as is humanly possible, with God's help, congruence between role and identity. Any and all roles are never the person, but only a facade through which we catch glimpses of the authentic self. A role can become less of a facade to one committed to making it so.

The reality of sin as nonidentity or inauthentic identity might be discovered as an issue to some extent in all opposing edge experiences. Part of the opposition one feels in these adverse experiences is related to the fact that they tend to oppose and rattle both our identity and trust in a loving good God and the basic benevolence of the world. These experiences can oppose false or inauthentic self by uncovering the reality that there is a divine depth dimension to life with which we lose contact in the course of ordinary normal events and occasions. During the moments of adversity, a radical questioning often emerges about the meaning and value of life and the humans to which we are closest. These tensions created between the self as it now exists and the self as we believe it needs to become can intensify. This tension sets up the possibility of conversion and transformation into a more authentic way of being-in-the-world and with others.

Classical Christian theology speaks of sin in a number of ways in which the result is in serious impropriety and unevenness in which human relationships become marred by inauthenticity. Augustine, following Paul in Rom. 1:18 and following, argued sin is best understood as concupiscence, which is a distorted form of will or love, in which one turns to mediocre, secondary things and abandons any serious pursuit of superior entities and existents, strictly speaking, God (*The City of God*, XII, 6). Sin exists at the location where there is a shift in the order of things and the fleeting, created things are pursued as ends in themselves rather than being accurately captured as the signifiers which ought to

be demonstrating the arm and deity of God. The self-position of pride is a sinful posture where the self attempts to become its own source and reference point rather than referring itself to God.

This bias is the basis of all sin, and takes many appearances, but essentially misshapes in one way or another human perception of everything that is and all human projects. Infringement of divine interpretation is the human predicament. Kierkegaard notes that sin which manifests as anxiety, despair, and dread, is a regarding of the self as the focus and criterion for one's own life.⁹ The modern person regards the self as something self-generated. So the essential actuality of the self is grasped as a human program. This leads to a great deal of insecurity and an obsession with self-care, since one is perceived to be one's own foremost creative project. The paradox of Christianity is the belief that humans are truly free to be uniquely who they were created to be, but only when given strength and identity from God, and therefore, saved from the deluded notion that they are or can be their own center, create their own essence or nature, and achieve the highest possible selfhood and self-experience from their own strength.

Overthrow and Passing of Former Self

What the opposing edge experience does is radically call into question the capability, and endowment of one's selfhood. The ease with which trauma and trouble can seriously shake even the strongest selves among us inevitably points to another source of strength, namely, God. People discover, during times of misery and distress, that their constitution

⁹ Soren Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Dread*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1980).

is indeed wobbly and, further, it is often their perception that if they would not possess God, their situation would be both precarious and desperate. Crises often relieve us of the inclination to attempt to fashion an identity of our own arbitrary devising. They relieve us of self-corroboration by others and a search for recognition through prestige, material wealth, class, or education, all of which become exposed as auxiliary identities which cannot possibly sustain human self-identity in any consequential manner. The power of these secondary identities is exposed as brittle during these times. This provides an opening for reinvesting identity into ultimate, authentic identity. This also happens when others endeavor to foist some identity upon us as though they had the power or permission to declare themselves as actually capable and qualified to define another's identity or worth.¹⁰

The individuals or groups that one is closest to and most emotionally connected with tend to have a great deal of influence over one's identity. Even for Jesus, the struggle to define himself ultimately in light of his relationship and intimacy with the One he called the Father, was steadily and repeatedly called into question by those closest to him, that is, his family, his closest circle of friends and disciples, and his theological antagonists and rivals, who were of the same Jewish faith.

One of the biggest hindrances to self-transcendence and finding and grounding identity in God is being a part of any group that holds itself as some elite group that feels capable of and authorized to believe themselves qualified to define human nature. Being or at least feeling that one is a part of some elite "in" peer group might be

¹⁰ Pannenberg, *Systematic Theology*, 2: 247ff.

considered as normal adolescent behavior and necessary in solidifying a sense of ego-identity. The pastoral task here is to assist persons integrate these earlier ego images or pseudo-identities through deconstruction, a process of relativization or seeing-through them for what they are and are not, and then enabling them to be transcended in a caring process that results in and embodies the self-identity being grounded more fully in the christological structure of the human self.

This in no way denies the way in which social location goes into the process of creating a person's sense of himself or herself and one's self awareness and contributes significantly to one's self esteem. Surely, it is God who sets up the historical contingency that is our social location. But the task of self-transcendence is to surpass these given, inherited self-configurations and self-accruals that we have called natural, given self and allow the reality of God and one's intimacy with God to integrate and transform these identities into a more authentic way of being-in-the-world. It is only in the encounter with the God of revelation that we are aware of the contingency of our historical identities and realize that while being created in a specific social location of multiple perspectives, the God of history calls us to open and trust ourselves to the divine incursion into our sphere and transcend these accidental circumstances and become what we really are, namely, creatures of this Creator. Mature human identity advances from this strong conscious identification with the person and work of Jesus. It awards one access to God and allows God to grant authentic humanity through the inward action and occasion of the Spirit.

The clergy can utilize all experiences which tend to create any dissonance in the experience of core self and assist the person with the modification in the personality. The

primary process of the self in moving toward self-transcendence is to incorporate the novel authenticity being offered to it by God at the edge, into the original self-core. The self holds together in a new way the former self-attributes, while assimilating the fresh and additional details received from one's latest edge experiences.

Identity integration is an process of evolving self configuration, where one feels coherence with one's past self. That is, one feels oneself somewhat identical to the person one was, and yet, at the same time, one feels that one is altered from that former self in subtle but often in exciting ways. Ideally, this evolving process of identity for the Christian is established institutionally and give social structure in the presence of the church.

The church is the institutionalized form of the process of theological self-transcendence and seeks to conduct this most crucial of human dynamics under the appropriate guardianship and safekeeping since, as we noted before, this evolving dynamic tends to be rather fragile. On top of this, the other structures, resources, and institutions needed for human self-transcendence such as the organized fixtures for health care, economic viability, political democratization, and other social and educational institutions are not consistently and equally available for all humans in the movement of self-transcendence. This failure to provide these societal structures for all humans in their process is the greatest problem caused by human sin.

Non-Self and Negative Identity in Dehumanization and Oppression

One of the most negative and often destructive consequences of the entanglement of self-identity in sinful investment is the dehumanization and oppression which results from

the accrual and assimilation of self elements which contribute to what we are calling negative identity. Sin and evil have an existential moment in history that one can only describe as painful and dehumanizing.¹¹

The “not I” or “not indulged I” that constitutes the shadowy impulses of the self that forms one’s negative identity has its roots in the process of enculturation which primary caretakers put their progeny through. Normally, it begins with enabling young children to gain control over their aggressive, sexual, and other problematic emotional and somatic drives (Freud’s id), and assisting them to express appropriately or sublimate these impelling interior pressures until, hopefully, children interiorize the parent in the shape of ego, that then serves as the child’s personalized, introjected, executive function and serves to channel the personal energy and impulses in socially acceptable ways.¹²

The more difficult these impulses are to manage, the more anxiety they produce in others and oneself. They often turn up dissociated and controlling one’s behavior unconsciously. These prohibited impulses can be projected onto weaker individuals or groups, who are then persecuted because they now embody the taboo behavior and can be kept at a safe psychological distance, thereby reducing one’s own anxiety about these emotional issues.

Although a great deal of mischief and harm can ensue from failing to learn to control and channel one’s vital emotional and somatic impulses, projecting these deviating

¹¹ Robert. A. Baron, *Human Aggression* (New York: Plenum, 1977).

¹² Gerard. G. Neuman, ed. *Origins of Human Aggression: Dynamics and Etiology* (New York: Human Sciences Press, 1987).

and difficult-to-manage interior surges upon minorities and other powerless individuals or groups, leads to another class of injury and harm, namely, institutionally sanctioned, structural dehumanization, which follows in often the frighteningly efficient, systematic oppression of minorities. In this process, the notion of sin becomes debased to the qualities that the oppressor group rejects in itself and projects onto the minority group. This begins a different process of mistaken identity.¹³ We mentioned that one part of nonidentity is the investment of self-identity in arbitrary, subsidiary, and frivolous roles and failing to integrate these into the primary theological identity. In this second process of nonidentity, a negative identity is thrown upon an economically or politically disenfranchised people or often, simply a diverse people. Through an largely fabricated ideological mythology, this group is scapegoated and stereotyped into being perceived as subhuman. The oppressed interiorize, to some extent, this negative identity or non-self of invisibility and voicelessness. The oppressors also interiorize the mythology of subhuman humans, likewise carrying about with them images of nonself and nonidentity. In this process, both victims and victimizers are inhumanly affected and diminished in considerable ways.

Part of the evolution of personal identity is perceiving oneself in distinction from others. In the young child, the identity is formed in a gradual grasping of the fact that one is not one's mother, and that mother is a unique, distinct, differentiated location of self in contrast to oneself. This is a process which continues throughout life. To some extent, one

¹³ Erik Erikson, "The Problems of Ego Identity," *Journal of the American Psychoanalytic Association* 4 (1956): 428; Michael Galanter, "Cults and Zealot Self-help Movements: A Psychiatric Perspective" *American Journal of Psychiatry* 147 (1990): 543.

is always aware that the self exists only because of the existence of other selves.

Erik Erikson, in his classic work on the formation of identity, notes that customarily across all cultures one finds in young people the urgent need to construct identity through the psychic internalization of the unique selfhood of one's family, tribe or principally, in youth, the peer group.¹⁴ However, Erikson unearthed a universal and robust bias in youth toward an obstinate overestimation of the value of one's own reference group, a proceeding he labeled as *pseudospeciation*. This idea suggests that the process is an inaccurate and misleading philosophical and anthropological attempt at categorizing humanity. Since one's adolescent, peer reference group is both ethnocentric and egocentric, these first attempts at anthropological classification are insufficient and mistaken. Youth raise standards for authentic humanity that are little more than a mirror image of their reference group. If this process were only limited to teenagers struggling to find meaning and make sense out of the adult world, and if juveniles passed through this character-forming struggle with a good sense of what standards constitute authentic human identity and what criteria are arbitrary and irrelevant for making judgments about people, negative identity would not pose such a continuous dilemma. Unhappily, this process which Erikson delineated as a youthful predicament, is also the predicament of human sin, which God's historical revelation in Jesus Christ has unveiled as the reality in which we are all mired.

The paradox of sin as nonidentity is that the investment of self is made through a concentrated infusion of self-identity in some group identity based upon, for example,

¹⁴ Erikson, *Identity, Youth and Crisis; Childhood and Society*.

social factors. These self-identities, while often containing elements of authentic humanity, fall quite short of the image of authentic humanity as we see it embodied in the person of Jesus. Humans identify with an image or archetype of humanity and tend, both to integrate consciously and unconsciously, selfhood in and around that image. One particularly hears this process referred to in the current discussion about defining moments. If by defining moment, something like an edge experience is meant, we can affirm these moments. But we postulate a human inability to reconstitute and redirect our essential humanity in relation to God, and turn ourselves into a thing other than what we were created to be. We can do this to a modest extent, because of the open nature of our identity. Certainly, we are free enough to turn from any decisive relation to God and from any serious theological consideration of the nature of our own anthropology.

Although it is true that an inevitable proportion of our identity is constituted from the raw material of our experiences, our constitutional, genetic capabilities and the social roles we play and enjoy playing, a strong tendency for all of us is to participate in nonidentity by over-investing in and exaggerating the significance of these subsidiary perceptions of our selves. We tend to get caught up in this process of pseudospeciation. The secular course of the world inevitably drops the question of God. When the question of God is dropped or ignored in any discussion of anthropology, then miscellaneous and often odd criteria for authentic humanity can be engineered. Douglas Meeks maintains that the greatest threat to the identity of the theological community, both the identity of Christian individuals and Christian churches is the pervasive tendency for modern humanity to understand itself in terms of consumers in a society where the market is the

only institution with any significant force and where personal and relational values, virtues, meaning, worth, and indeed human character itself becomes simply another commodity defined by the market place.¹⁵

Our design posits that the challenge for the modern pastor is to help create an alternative climate where people understand their personality as the continuing project and creation of themselves and God. It is primarily God who creates the deepest self and liberates energies from the natural, given self and allows a shift in emotional investment into the deeper self which God is creating in the image of Christ. The trinitarian field of divine operations enables us to understand the trinitarian God as the field of our experiences where particular novel occasions are synthesized by God into the self that we now are, creating a new self with deeper ties to God's self and thus, appropriating more of the character, quality, virtue, and mode of operation characteristic of the divine field.

The pastor is the one called to remind the church what Daniel Day Williams calls the transcending of cultural and temporal identities to come to terms with a theological identity and an understanding that Christianity asserts human identity cannot be conceived apart from the God-human dialogue.¹⁶ Dehumanization and oppression occur whenever a human ultimately experiences himself or herself or has others behave toward him or her as less than this authentic identity, or abandons the challenge to integrate and transcend subordinate and subsidiary identities.

¹⁵ Douglas M. Meeks, "The Future of Theology in a Commodity Society," in *The Future of Theology: Essays in Honor of Juergen Moltmann* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1996), 253-67.

¹⁶ Daniel Day Williams, "A Theological View of Identity," in *The New Shape of Pastoral Theology*, ed. William Oglesby (Nashville: Abingdon Press, 1969), 74 ff.

Williams affirms that the question of human identity can only be answered in the theological pursuit of discerning the nature of God, locating where and how God is acting in history, and embracing every aspect of that activity. Further, he confirms that the tendency for moderns to interpret themselves in light of personal and vocational roles and relationships is idolatrous and, therefore, the essence of the theological idea of sin. This does not mean that our common theological vocation excludes personal diversity or rejection of secular calling and work. Rather, the experience of our alienation from God reminds us that our center and identity is accomplished in relation to God who reconciles us to him, us to each other, and reconciles disparate elements within the self in the unity of love through loving and being loved.

The human experience of psychic or social alienation, or dehumanization, is a negative edge experience which can lead to a fuller grasp of one's most authentic human identity. Particularly in this advanced dehumanized state of mass society, everyone readily loses touch with what is deepest within them. Therefore, who people really are needs to be affirmed and nourished if they are to remain genuinely human and progress in their humanity.

Although the pastor might not get many confessions of persons being oppressive or acting in dehumanizing ways toward others, the occasions of people confessing to the minister moments and relationships where they are being dehumanized are regularly inevitable. They offer the pastor an opportunity for reflection upon the location of a person's investment in self-identity. The process of dehumanization is one where persons are treated as if they were not fellow creatures and individuals of sacred worth. They are

attributed by the oppressor with negative identity. Normally, this means that the oppressed are undervalued and reduced to the identity of “outsider” and as “other.”

The effects of violence are well documented. Victims suffer from a multidimensional impoverishment, particularly when this type of sinful expression is structured institutionally and sanctioned by political parties or religious groups. Pseudospeciation finds expression in odd, arbitrary configurations based upon social factors. This leads to the kind of negative identity which often brings about a person’s or a group’s failure and self-destruction.

The Christian community is called to form an identity not as much in opposition to others and other groups but in positively identifying itself in solidarity with others, transcending often fascinating and even relatively meaningful but ultimately not conclusive or decisive social identities. Christian identity emerges from a theological anthropology which interprets human authenticity as solidarity with others as persons evolving in a unique manner into the likeness of God and therefore, as already possessing the same identity, yet also moving toward an appropriation of a more authentic identity and destiny in the field of the triune God.

Dehumanization and oppression are a result of the over-cathexis or investment of identity in subsidiary secondary roles and qualities. Oppression often occurs because of power abuse. Racism is often a rationalization to justify oppression.¹⁷ But oppression is complex and it commonly occurs from the inability to integrate and

¹⁷ Jon Sobrino, “Five Hundred Years: Structural Sin and Structural Grace,” in *The Principle of Mercy: Taking the Crucified People from the Cross* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis Books, 1994), 49-58.

harmonize subsidiary self-identities into some particular expression of the decisive, ultimate theological human identity.

Self-Fracture: Grief, Loss, and Death

Another primary experience of adversity that both radically questions the worth and meaning of human self-posture in the world and, at the same time offers the chance for creative self-transformation through a novel patterning and redirection of self-investment, is the occasion of dispossession. The deprivation of a consequential entity, whether it be a deeply cherished person, possession, status, vocation, relationship, home, or activity in which a person has invested significant amounts of self-identity is one of the central breakdowns of self and horizon that anyone of us can ever experience.

The fracturing of the self that one experiences in loss is an emotionally traumatic breakdown that entails a loss of identity due to the detriment of identity that one had psychically infused in the particular object of affection. Theories about both the dynamics and the typical behaviors associated with the stages of loss are important for the clergy and might call for special pastoral attention.¹⁸

However, for this project what particularly is of interest to us and essential to the process of evolution in self-transcendence and the theory of care proposed here, are the latter stages, where we find two primary psychic processes happening. The first of these is a complex position of disorganization, where the bereaved experiences the strongest

¹⁸ See Erich Lindemann, "Symptomatology and Management of Acute Grief," *American Journal of Psychiatry* 101 (1945):141; Wayne Oates, *Pastoral Care and Counseling in Grief and Separation* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1976); Elisabeth Kubler-Ross, *On Death and Dying* (New York: Macmillan Publishing, 1970), chaps. 3, 4; Colin. M. Parkes and Robert Weiss, *Recovery From Bereavement* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

dissolution and disintegration of former self-identity. The earliest stages of grieving through a loss primarily entail coming to terms with the shock of disbelief and laboring through the tangle of complicated, emotional constellations of feelings. These include primarily denial, passivity, hopelessness, both emotional and somatic expressions of piercing anguish, and the exertion to regain self-control over myriad acknowledged overwhelming feelings. But when one achieves some integration of and acceptance of these initial emotions, one then moves to a point of embracing the actuality of the loss as inescapable. This creates a psychic identity vacuum, since the loss is no longer present to help in the ongoing human process of self-definition. An identity void occurs where one experiences a psychic nothingness. The loss of this kind of a meaningful actuality leaves a perceived paucity and diminished sense of self. Regression is not uncommon as the bereaved plunges back into a former, more stable self-posture.

During this time, the self regroups to overcome its felt vacancy and impotence. The self, during this process of integrating the loss, seeks and finds novel realities with which to identify and redefine itself. Often it seeks and finds previously embraced self-actualities with which the self identified and defined itself, but that now can be instilled with more significant and more appropriate investment.

The process of self-disintegration and disorganization emphasizes our fundamental theological and anthropological point. The human self is essentially a self in relation and needs to encounter new relation after the loss of an old relation. Thus, the pastor is presented with a moment both to reflect with the person upon the nature of the human self, and how to redefine that self, as well as facilitate the grief process. In the final stage

of grief, namely reorganization and adaptation, is a location which offers the theological possibility of conversion to a new self-posture and self-experience. The pastor ought to be available to assist in the occasion of redirecting the vital energies of self-identification and self-definition into a deeper intimacy with the triune God, when and if the individual is inclined in that direction. The grieving individual divests identity energies from a lost object, and can reinvest these available energies into a variety of novel objects. The pastor can assist the investment or reinvestment into the life of God.

As a consequence of the extreme edge experience of mortality and radical finitude, the self is perhaps in the very opportune situation to develop a closer relationship with God and so define the self more strongly in relation to God. The pastor normally will find that significant loss affords people the kind of circumstance for opportunity for novel self-transcendence because of the newly present malleability and freedom, perhaps even compulsion and necessity to redefine the self.¹⁹ Possibly there is no better prompting to do just this in the universe of human experience than the embrace of loss and death proffer.²⁰

Illness and the Breaking of the Body

Another crucial edge moment of adversity which challenges an individual's self-understanding and presents an opportunity for a movement toward a more authentic mode of being-in-the-world by calling for accelerated self-transcendence, is the experience of the

¹⁹ R. Scott Sullender, "Three Theoretical Approaches to Grief," *Journal of Pastoral Care* 33 (1979): 243-51.

²⁰ Michael R. Leming, and Gerald R. Dickinson, *Understanding Death, Dying, and Bereavement* (New York: Holt, Rinehart, and Winston, 1985); Austin Kutscher, Arthur Carr, and Lillian Kutscher, eds., *Principles of Thanatology* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987).

breaking of the body coming from physical illness. The pastor is in a continuous condition of relationship with parishioners who are experiencing serious or critical physical life-threatening or life-impairing illnesses. These physical breakdowns occur persistently in one way or another in the life of the laity. Typically, the pastor is with parishioners in hospital, nursing homes, or hospice settings every day.

Comfort, presence, and assistance with the new challenges associated with illness is a large part of the pastor's work.²¹ The breaking of the body is not only an essential limit or boundary moment of human existence, it also might be the best parable we possess for the human predicament. Physical illness as constantly present and among either ourselves or those closest to us, both symbolizes and literally presents to us the exertion of self-transcendence and the fragility of this process as we experience it in the comparable yielding and brittleness of the body. Serious illness throws us into something of a constant identity crisis. It reminds us that defining and redefining ourselves and questioning whether we are indeed authentic or not is an enduring task, in light of the breaking of the body and its stark reminder to us of our contradictions, finitude, mortality, and the attendant existential manifestations of dread, anxiety, guilt, and violence that this breaking brings. This breaking calls us to question our identity and our worth, and if we are not numb, our place in the scheme of things. During illness, ultimate questions move to the existential and philosophical foreground.

Illness reminds us of the final stages of grief. It is an experience of disorientation and

²¹ Harold Omer, "Enhancing the Impact of Therapeutic Interventions," *American Journal of Psychotherapy* 44 (1990): 218; David Reiser, Andrea Schroeder, et al., *Patient Interviewing: The Human Dimension* (Baltimore: Williams & Wilkins, 1980).

disintegration. It offers too the opportunity for reorientation, more intimacy with God, and the exploration of more authentic postures in the self and in the world. The effort in illness is not only overcoming the illness, but surmounting the frustration and disappointment, coming to accept the limits of being human and being embodied, and struggling with the feelings of disconnection from others, who are healthy and who continue to function well and at a energetic pace. Illness is often humiliating. Perhaps, for the first time since one was a child, one has to face the difficult experience of having to depend upon others, since illness typically means loss of self-autonomy and self-privilege.

The breaking of the body is a moment of disintegration and breakdown of self and horizon, since it brings up and often forces one to face questions of meaning and human self-identity. Whenever the body misfires and repudiates us, we realize that no matter how resilient it seems and how often we take up our pallet and walk again, we grasp that we must be more than a body, more than our health, more our ability to operate well, make money, and take care of ourselves.

The healing of the body, even though aided today by modern biology, chemistry, and medicine, is still somewhat mysterious.²² It can be a symbol of God's grace. The pastor can assess the location of a person's self-identity by the reaction or lack of reaction to the breaking of the body over which she or he daily presides, during home visitations, and the never-ending rounds to call upon and care for those broken ones in the nursing homes, hospitals, rehabilitation centers, and hospices.

²² John. E. Anderson, ed. *Psychological Aspects of Aging* (Washington, D. C.: American Psychological Association, 1956); Robert Butler, *Why Survive?: Being Old in America* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975).

Body theology and body identity result from embodiment, yet the body is a contradiction.²³ It is, on the one hand, a metaphor of the finite fleetingness of all human experience, yet the capacities given to us in our embodiment, namely our heart, soul, body, and mind form a unity and point us toward our future place in God's future.

The pastor has the chance to provide comfort and caring at these times that are opened up by our themes which, we posit, assist in the divine effort to grace humans with the divine likeness. This shifting in functioning from given self to self in relation to God functioning, as we argued earlier, is greatly facilitated by the enhanced vulnerability, or more correctly, the opportunity to attend to the vulnerability that was always there, but not particularly acknowledged in any significant, conscious manner by us during normal moments. These moments ought to open us to a deeper involvement and intimacy with God. They can be moments of conversion and creative transformation, particularly with a thoughtful mentor to guide us. The outcome of such times can result in a suppleness that enables God to grant us the religious affections mentioned previously.

Our object is now to move to a discussion of the marks of character discussed in several discernment programs which are reasonably probable outcomes that concretely embody authentic theological and anthropological self-structures.

²³ Michael Balint, *The Doctor, the Patient, and the Illness* (New York: International Universities Press, 1964).

CHAPTER 9

A Proposal for Diagnostic Discernment Criteria

Establishment of Adequate Criteria for Assessment in this Pastoral Theology

Many models for pastoral assessment are available to ministers and priests. They provide differing sets of criteria, which are regarded as appropriate and adequate for use by the clergy in its role as diagnostician. Clergy ought to possess competence in conceptual heuristic specifications of both psychological and theological models for this work which are, as Pruyser asserts, “phenomenologically abundant, productive and sensitive to individual differences.”¹ Also, these guidelines ought to be accessible to laity, not too abstract or complex, but reflective of the manner in which lay persons commonly speak about psychic phenomena and events. What we propose here is simply a set of conceptual guidelines for assessing theological phenomena and occasions in the human psychic field, which are readily usable by the clergy and the laity, criteria that is based upon our earlier theological assumptions about the nature of God and God’s effect upon the human personality as we have explicated these themes thus far.

We postulate that the spiritual and moral manifestation of the gifts and fruits of the Spirit and the religious affections can function as conceptual guidelines in this task of the pastor. We affirm that these affections and inclinations are discrete, valid, reliable, phenomenologically rich, and that they describe psychic events which possess a reasonably probable degree of consistency with the activity of the divine force field and therefore, are psychic interior traces that God has imparted as a result of this encounter.

¹ Pruyser, *Minister as Diagnostician*, 50-53.

The theological variables that we are suggesting for use in this account are warranted by the dominant and authoritative Christian tradition of religious affections, and we believe they do justice to what we have explicated earlier as germane to a pastoral evaluation. This tradition of religious affections is known under the categorization of discerning the spirits. These traceable results have been affirmed in the long standing Christian tradition of recognizing and discerning the actions and impulses of God upon the human spirit. They have in the past and can presently serve as evaluative criteria for pastors in the work of spiritual direction with the laity.

Nancey Murphy calls the traditional practice of making such knowledge claims about God's activity in human life Christian epistemic practice.² Murphy is making an argument for a particular theological method in the text we are relying so heavily upon for this project. However, our search for appropriate theological data as the focus of pastoral diagnosis is similar to her search for appropriate theological data for the model she proposes for a systematic theology. Christian epistemic practices make the assumption that we can sort out the data in the human psychic field and objectively define what constitutes the psychic themes of Christian theology, and that these themes can not only be conceptualized, but they can be used to provide empirical confirmation of the divine field of force and used as an assessment tool for the task of pastoral assessment. In fact, if we are to maintain theological integrity, we cannot bifurcate Christian experience into a psychological datum and a theological explanation.

² Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 160.

Discernment is a claim about differentiating and defining the action of God on the human self. The tradition of epistemic practices involves discernment, but also human transformation as it is related to personal conversion and communal reconciliation. It involves self-analysis and the creation of self in relation to God. In addition, it involves a focus upon interiority, but is not restricted to the interior life. It also has actuality in a proceeding and historical course of God which finds expression in specific circumstances and psychic conditions. This tradition of discernment is both pastoral and prophetic. It involves an option for the poor and oppressed and calls for practical decisions. The actuality we are trying to perceive in discernment is the activity and presence of the Father of Jesus in the field of the Spirit in actual human psychic phenomena such as the New Testament suggests in its discussion of the fruits and products of faith and the Spirit.³

Therefore, the most demanding exigency in our search for pertinent data for pastoral assessment is to establish criteria for evaluation that have an orientation to the nature of God and not merely data or criteria that reflects other elements such those referred to by Schillebeeckx as nonreligious elements.⁴ Pastoral discernment means struggling with the laity to differentiate the divine within the broad category of human religious experience.

In terms of a christology for pastoral assessment, we are following Luke Timothy Johnson's position that the New Testament texts and narratives provide us with the selfhood of Jesus as the decisive meaning and pattern for Christian humanity. We affirm

³ Jon Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America* (Maryknoll, N.Y.: Orbis, 1987), 133-40.

⁴ Schillebeeckx, *Church*.

affirm this selfhood indicated by the way in which God can transform human lives into a patterned anthropological existence witnessed in Christ.⁵ Johnson asserts a decisive pattern for authentic human existence. He posits the gospels are remarkably consistent in the aspect of the identity and destiny of Jesus. All agree on the same pattern of radical outflowing love of God and solidarity toward others, and all call those who follow Jesus to embody this essential fundamental pattern. This project is an attempt to embody the essence of this pattern for pastoral assessment in the work of spiritual direction with lay individuals.

Another New Testament scholar, N. T. Wright, postulates that the New Testament introduces us to God's renewal and transformation of humanity through a presentation of authentic humanity in Jesus, and an early sophisticated theological reflection on that authenticity in the letters of St. Paul, where the nuances of that pattern of transformed humanity are promoted.⁶

This goal and destiny of humanity is resurrection. But in the time between now and the resurrection, both the gospels and the Pauline epistles again are quite unmistakable and emphatic that the Holy Spirit here and now begins the work of resurrection through the process of transforming and renewing humanity. This transformation is best symbolized, according to Wright, by the traditional word holiness and in Paul's writing

⁵ Luke Timothy Johnson, *The Real Jesus: The Misguided Quest for the Historical Jesus and the Truth of the Traditional Gospels* (San Francisco: HarperSanFrancisco, 1996), 141-50.

⁶ Nicholas T. Wright, *What Saint Paul Really Said: Was Paul of Tarsus the Real Founder of Christianity?* (Grand Rapids: W. B. Eerdmans, 1997), 135-51.

finds the classic expression in Rom. 12:1-2:

I appeal to you brothers and sisters, through the mercy of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy, acceptable to God: this is your true and appropriate worship. Do not be conformed to the present age, but be transformed by the renewal of your mind, so that you may approve the will of God, that which is good, acceptable and complete.

Wright asserts that holiness is not a discretionary accessory but is the single, synoptic judgment that characterizes the active participation of the self-transcendence of all persons who are renewed in Christ. Holiness is in one sense already received and so provides identity and self-stability, but holiness also provokes discontent with the current self-state and furthers the renewing grasp for the future, fuller appropriation of the divine likeness. This self-transcending dynamic is summed up in the Pauline assertion in Phil. 3:12-14, where the apostle writes "I do not think I have already attained it; but one thing I do, forgetting what lies behind and straining forward for what lies ahead, I press on towards the goal for the prize of the upward call of God in Jesus Christ." Holiness in the writings of Paul is described in terms of dying and rising with Christ, language that Albert Schweitzer called Paul's Christ mysticism or that others call Christ participation language.⁷ The spiritual intimacy with the triune God which Paul embraces leads to a world-divergent life of holiness, which is characterized by the renewing of human bonds and human solidarity in an inclusive ethic, ecclesiology, and spirited missiology of agapic love. This spiritual intimacy is generated by the Spirit and shaped by both the context and the effort of the local individuals and community.

⁷ Albert Schweitzer, *The Mysticism of Paul the Apostle*, trans. William Montgomery (New York: Seabury, 1968).

Pastoral Assessment as an Exposition of Religious Affections

The behavioral criteria for this model of assessment are the criteria found in the New Testament and supplemented with more recent assessment criteria taken from discernment practices, or what Nancey Murphy calls Christian epistemic practices.⁸ These practices are taken from recent discernment traditions outside the biblical witness. They come from later tradition and provide a contemporary balance to the earlier witness and data. Since we are asserting that this is a scientific theology in its method, we advance an appraisal that takes the form of a theological, experiential configuration.⁹

We agreed that this criteria ought to be understood in the context of human self-evolution as human task and divine gift. They are best classified in Lonergan's distinct, concise idea of self-transcendence. This term gives an accurate and coherent account of the biblical material and it explicates an adequate goal for pastoral work with the laity.

The New Testament texts persuade us that certain patterns and attributes of human behavior can be attributed to the activity of the trinitarian God upon the compliant, cooperative, and open human subject. It would be difficult to account for Christianity both in its theoretical aspects and its actual practices in ethics, prayer, care, hymnody, worship, and love at all, outside of this most practical and fundamental assertion. The entire tradition of Christianity in many ways is a testing of the spirits and the Spirit to ascertain an authentically human selfhood inspired by the divine field of force.

Since the tradition of spiritual discernment has been so fertile, and has produced such

⁸ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 152.

⁹ Ibid., 153-54.

a large amount of literature upon the subject, we want to use data from three of the dominant traditions. We hope to weave our own tapestry from the threads of these narratives into our own proposal and work toward explicating a set of general guidelines that have something of a pluralistic, universal, and ecumenical quality about them.

The traditions we are tapping for this proposal include a Roman Catholic tradition, exemplified by Jon Sobrino, S.J., who, as a Jesuit priest, represents both the modern expression of Ignatian spirituality and one of the most significant expressions of recent Latin American liberation theology. Also, an American clergyman, who may be possibly the greatest theologian this country has yet produced, namely, Jonathan Edwards, will be considered. Finally, we will consider the spiritual tradition of Methodism in the thought of John Wesley and the role of religious affections in the Christian life as the subject is addressed by him.

Jon Sobrino: Discerning God by Way of the Poor of the Earth

Jon Sobrino, S.J., is a professor of theology and philosophy at Central American University in San Salvador. He represents for us both the tradition of spiritual discernment of the Roman Catholic Ignatian heritage and he also is one of the most influential theologians writing from the historical situation of the poor and oppressed in Latin America. He possesses both a scholar's mind and training and the heart of a priest, with a concern for the laity and insights into the kind of tradition of spiritual discernment that works with them. A personal friend of Archbishop Oscar Romero and the six priests, including Ignacio Ellacuria, martyred by Salvadorian hit squads, he missed assassination along with the other six in 1989, because he was out of the country running a workshop for priests.

Sobrino posits that Christian discernment ought to follow the structure and pattern for discernment similar to that of Jesus which, he posits, can only be achieved by following him. Following Jesus is discernment of Jesus. We ought not to assume that the Spirit of Jesus is necessarily clarified by existing ecclesiastical structures or any other current Jesus movement. The structure of Jesus' life indicates what Christian discernment practices ought to look like.¹⁰

The first element in the structure of discernment is the precise clarification of who God really was. Jesus always sought to find and love God in the particularity of loving his neighbor. Especially, Sobrino posits, Jesus showed a *partial* love. He identified as the setting for discerning God's will and finding God's presence, the predicament of the poor and the oppressed. They are the face of God, and they are the ones who understand the kingdom.

Sobrino posits that discerning Jesus is not as much about psychology as it is about the choices and historical commitments which Jesus made. Jesus found in God a partiality for the poor. Jesus also found in his discernment practices that God was against everything which dehumanized human beings or annulled the communion of sisters and brothers expressed in the *Our Father*. This is the first structure in the pattern of Christian discernment, an incarnation that takes the side of the poor.¹¹

The second criterion for discernment is "an effective praxis of love."¹² Sobrino posits

¹⁰ Sobrino, *Jesus in Latin America*, 133.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 134.

¹² *Ibid.*, 135.

that Jesus sought the will of God by seeking specific and energetic resolution to actual problems which dehumanized people. In particular, Jesus saw sin as structural and a structural abuse of power by the wealthy and the powerful.

Third, Sobrino posits a praxis of socio/political love. The love that was the basis of all Jesus' work took the specific form which we call justice in the nexus of the complete social fabric. Jesus discerned God as desiring to re-create the entire world in both the individual human being and all human beings in the social order.

The fourth criterion of the structure of discernment is conflictual love. If love is going to be partial, effective, and socio/political, inevitably it is going to be conflictual love. Conflict is intrinsic from the moment Jesus discovered God's partiality to the poor. Love for the oppressed often meant standing against the oppressors. Jesus sought to humanize all people, which meant he took different postures toward different groups of people.

Sobrino also notes that discernment is done in a process of historical development. One discovers the nature of God not through some momentary meditation on God, but through the continuing commitment and involvement in the process and praxis of love.

Further, there was a disruptive element in Jesus' praxis. It was often unworkable for Jesus to take a stand of neutrality. Neutrality seemed to imply compliance with sinful expressions which dehumanized the marginalized. Jesus found neutrality, rationalizations, noninvolvement, and propaganda which bolstered the powerful status quo and many dehumanizing practices disparaging to the genuine authenticity of God.¹³

Finally, Jesus' discernment practices, Sobrino notes, were open to verification. Jesus

¹³ Ibid., 137.

was not absorbed in orthodox pronouncements. This means that Jesus' discernment was never simply something that existed in the sphere of wishful thinking or good intention. Rather, it was always subject to practice and therefore, to evaluation and historical verification.

Sobrino concludes that Christian discernment practices, if they stay close to the historical reality of Jesus will contend with particular values, specific criteria, and historical verification, that corroborate the reality of God's partial love for the poor of the earth as embodied in these features.

Jonathan Edwards: Discerning God's Beauty in Human Beauty

Jonathan Edwards has been selected as an important voice in this project for several reasons. Both his Americanism and his significance on this particular continent make him crucial to a pastoral theology done from an American perspective. Robert Jenson argues that Edwards' significance is due to his attempt to address the issues that theology was forced to speak to in a beginning New World and New England America. Jenson notes that, while the church on the continent was shaken by the fervor of Enlightenment, the American church was created by it. For this project, this means essentially that from the beginning, theology in America embraced the Enlightenment values of empiricism, experimental science, historical investigation, systematic utilitarianism, and pragmatism, since American theology was conceived only after the desirability and preeminence of these values had come to be accepted as the appropriate and adequate methods of operation in seeking the good, the true, and the beautiful in all intellectual pursuits, including theology. American theology rejected special pleas for starting the investigation

of any discipline by appeal to traditional authority, fideism, and historical contingency.¹⁴

Edwards began his theological efforts with this passion for critique and these Enlightenment values led him to a vision of theology as enlightened critique of the divine triune harmony, an exploration for a scientific approach to theology, and an experiential form of religion. Edwards' methodology of religious experience and phenomenology was also influenced by the excesses of the enthusiasts during the great American Revival of 1734, in which many questionable claims were made about the nature and activity of God, and the manifestation of the Spirit of God in human religious affections. As a Christian, Edwards did not, like many skeptics, that it was impossible to ascertain authentic moments and movements of the divine within the human self or pointless to even attempt such a feat, nor did he feel that religious sentiments were simply gushing human passions, and therefore, distracting and ultimately tedious commotions as did many of the Awakening's critics.

As an Enlightenment thinker and a pastor, he was both intensely involved in the current curiosity and study of the subject of the human self and the movement of the Spirit within the self, but in his defense of revivalism he did not embrace all the wild claims being made about God and the self. Rather, he sought a reasonable, verifiable set of criteria that might be used as an authentic heuristic parameter for evaluating the credibility of such assertions. His thought was formulated through the turmoil of the Great Awakening and through his vocation a theologian-philosopher, pastor, and Native American Missionary. Edwards sought to establish criteria for correcting the theological errors of the Deists,

¹⁴ Robert Jenson, *America's Theologian: A Recommendation of Jonathan Edwards* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1988), 13-15.

whose belief that God had no real historical potency or effect, grinded down any notion of human transcendence and therefore, any common human identity, since everyone was left to his or her rational capacities alone. He also sought to speak to the excesses of the theological enthusiasts, whose theological claims stretched all but the most naïve person's credulity.

The *Distinguishing Marks* are Edward's overture to the idea of setting up criteria for approximately calculating any religious experience. In the *Religious Affections*, he developed this fundamental notion into attempting to distinguish negative or inauthentic characteristics and those he considered authentic and accurate marks. Negative marks to Edwards did not proscribe the work of the Spirit, but in Edwards' intuition, they had little or nothing to do with the work of the Spirit. These may have been an actual part of the human psychic field and actually psychically experienced by the individual, but they were not were the strict subject matter of theology. Within the model of Nancey Murphy's methodology, we note they could not be tied in to the hard core of a theological program that was based on what was recognized and admitted about the nature of the triune God. Edwards was well-schooled in the British empiricism of John Locke, and his writing on this subject seems credible to a incisive degree from our modern scientific point of view.

Nancey Murphy posits that, typically, most Christian communities select observable, empirical events in both church life and individual psychic life and designate them as authentic activity or expressions of the divine being, a practice which is clearly evident throughout the Old and New Testaments and consistent with their theology.¹⁵ These acts

¹⁵ Murphy, *Theology in the Age of Scientific Reasoning*, 157.

of the triune God need to be heard through a hermeneutic of the nature and activity of God and a choice of criteria which any community believed was human appropriation of the christological structure of the human self in relation to God, and a convincing manifestation of the divine being within the human subject.

For Edwards, each authentic mark of the activity of the divine being was evident in what he called the religious affections. These were appropriate as criteria for the pastoral evaluation of souls for which the pastor was responsible, because of their emphatically and undeniably holy and gracious nature. Edwards correlated two primary sources for his theological program, the sacred texts of the New Testament and his personal observations of the religious experiences honed by the extensive years of caring for the souls of the individuals under his pastoral care. This enabled him to lay out what he asserts was a heuristic model for assessing the phenomenology of religious consciousness, which for him was the main theme of his pastoral work in counseling and caring for persons.

In his work entitled *The Religious Affections*, Edwards outlines twelve diverse, distinguishing features which he believed were appropriate and adequate criteria for the promising and authentic assessment of Christian personhood. One might say that in a true sense, these twelve defining criteria give us detailed particulars, in a more employable form, of the theological virtues of faith, hope, and love, which, crucial though they are to any understanding of Christian personhood, never resolve the issue of distinct enough precision for their application in pastoral evaluation. This problem of lack of specificity is one of the primary limitations which characterize the design of Paul Pruyser's scheme.

The secularists of Edwards' day had discredited religion, and the pluralistic situation

in the churches of New England presented inconsistent, contradictory, ambiguous, and even incredulous defining criteria that could not be reconciled. This created a theological morass for the person or pastor attempting to engage the laity in some serious theological self-reflection and self-examination.¹⁶

Given the nature of God and the nature of the pursuit of truth that are key to the theological and pastoral enterprise, Edwards, after much inquiry, believed that he discovered that authentic religious experience was manifested in a fairly uniform manner. Even if moral, gender, liturgical, and cultural differences were present within the Christian churches, Edwards believed that he discovered within any and all mature Christians a certain christological character that manifested itself in a manner that was consistent enough to set up a practical and authentic set of criteria for use in the pastoral work of evaluation and enabling parishioners from time-to-time to do some self-examination. The core affections, he asserted, ought to be there even if the outward expressions of them are diverse and often obscured by other personality characteristics and behaviors. It is also important to realize, as John Smith points out, that Edwards means something other than human passions or emotions when he spoke of the term religious affections. Emotions and passions come and go in the human. But the religious affections, which certainly have an emotional component, tended to be more complex than emotions, and they persisted and persevered, since they were actually the gift and presence of the divine being in the personality.¹⁷ While Edwards felt confident that his criteria and account of authentic

¹⁶ John Smith, *Jonathan Edwards: Puritan, Preacher, Philosopher* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1992), 11.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, 37.

religious affections were valid and reliable, he also cautioned about the misuse of his criteria and warned that, while the religious affections were real actualities, they were often difficult to discern, particularly in one's own personal self, even in the unlikely event that one might just be a saint. We now move to a discussion of Edwards' sequence and classification of authentic theological criteria for personality assessment.

The first item in Edwards' classification is in reality a statement about theological anthropology which sets the tone for the remainder of his discussion. The most authentic, that is, "truly spiritual and gracious" religious affections, he writes, are "influences and operations on the heart which are spiritual, supernatural, and divine."¹⁸ Nancey Murphy and Smith both characterize Edwards' theology as an understanding that authentic religion consists in procurement and display of the character of God as an outcome of the dynamic of the trinitarian indwelling and being gradually allured into the life of the Trinity in the trinitarian perichoresis.

This first affection which Edwards advances is a grasp of the basic fundamental process of self-evolution, the nature of the human self, the nature and activity of God and the manner in which God encounters the human self and recreates it as a self more rooted in relation to the life of the Trinity. Edwards shows how a willed availability of the human to God reestablishes the core and flow of the self. The core of the self is reoriented to God by human receptivity, which cannot be accomplished by human effort alone.

The second distinguishing quality of character is an appreciation and desire for God as God is in the divine being. The individual advances to a place where he or she begins

¹⁸ Jonathan Edwards, *The Religious Affections* (Carlisle: Banner of Truth, 1994), 124.

to love God not simply from any “relation God bears to the self or self-interest,” but rather simply because God is, as Edwards formulates, “transcendently excellent and amiable.”¹⁹ The more mature one is spiritually, the less one’s love for God is tainted by self-interest. While self-interest might play a part in a conversion from a life that was characterized by self-hatred or self-destruction or other forms of self-aggression, the love that one has for God ought to evolve toward and be characterized by the quality of purity of heart, as the beatitude proclaims. Lonergan postulates love as a gradual coming to love God for the fact that God is who God is as the holy, mysterious, loving Other who creates such sensitive creatures as us and moves us toward the divine horizon in this process of self-transcendence.²⁰

The third feature of spiritual authenticity in Edwards’ heuristic proposition for pastoral evaluation has an aesthetic feel and texture to it, similar to our own earlier discussion upon the affirmative edge experience regarding the spirituality of beauty. Edwards believed that there exists within the authentic experience of the divine, a resolute appreciation of the beauty and grandeur of God and that this comprehension is clear throughout the Christian texts in their praise and meditative deliberation on the beauty of holiness. One Edwards scholar notes that, unlike the typical stereotype of the Puritan preacher, Jonathan Edwards believed that the experience of God produced in the individual a comprehension and an

¹⁹ Ibid., 165.

²⁰ Soren Kierkegaard, *Works of Love: Some Christian Reflections in the Form of Discourses*, trans. Howard Hong and Edna Hong (New York: Harper & Row, 1962), 247-61.

ability to enjoy the beauty, elegance, luminosity, and majesty of the divine being, and that the encountering of God's beauty was both an authentic meeting of God and perhaps God's most alluring and captivating quality.²¹

Edwards notes, in his third feature, that religious affections are authentic when they stem from sheer delight in the "loveliness, beauty, sweetness, and excellency of divine things."²² Moreover, the next feature of his program adds upon the third. In it, Edwards stresses that this aesthetic appreciation of God is not a natural endowment, but is the work of the Spirit of God and an authentication of the Spirit's dynamism in the personality. If it was a natural aptitude it would hardly qualify as a feature in his program. In a sense, both of these features are graced qualities which are intrinsically related to the divine holiness, an appreciation of God's excellence in and of God's own self and the understanding that this awareness is in fact the beginning of the activity of God within one as one begins to differentiate the divine self from one's own self. These two features have to do with the dawning impression that the Other called God can be differentiated and perceived in differentiation from the flux and complex flow of the psychic field. This holy otherness of God is genuinely perceived by the loveliness and the enjoyment of this loveliness.

The benevolent superior power governs, not by brute force, but through the attractive power of the beauty. Edwards believed that the beauty of God was the central clue and reality to the being of God, and thus, that a true understanding of God and human nature begins with beauty. The natural beauty of the world corresponds to the inherent beauty of

²¹ Roland Delattre, *Beauty and Sensibility in the Thought of Jonathan Edwards* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1968).

²² Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 179.

the world's Creator. The theological truths hinting at the nature of God are an explication of the divine holy beauty. His pastoral theology therefore, is not a moralistic program but rather a program of the manner in which God lures humanity with the divine beauty in order to share with the humanity this splendor. This fourth sign of an authentic spirituality engages the primary place in Edwards' entire heuristic guide to authentic spirituality, since it really is essential to appreciate the sublime, yet still approachable, nature of God. He notes that, "Gracious affections arise from the mind being enlightened rightly and spiritually to understand or apprehend divine things."²³ This novel sensibility of God is not something we are born with, according to Edwards. It is a graced result of the actual encounter with the excellence and beauty of God, and the expanded capacity to experience this in God, which one previously did not possess. Due to the encounter with the divine beauty, a new sensibility of this beauty emerges. While natural beauty seems at least somewhat alluring to most human beings, and although there is notable variation in what might constitute authentic beauty, one of the authentic experiences of the divine being is that nothing could possibly be more excellent than the being or reality of the One who is luring one toward itself in the evolution toward greater self-transcendence.

The fifth characteristic in Edwards' heuristic model is that authentic spirituality is "attended with a reasonable and spiritual conviction of the reality and certainty of divine things."²⁴ What he is signifying here is the assertion that to speak of God is to realize that

²³ Ibid., 192.

²⁴ Ibid., 216.

God is not simply an object for study, but rather that the knowledge of God's reality impresses upon the individual the claim of God on us.²⁵ The fifth feature suggests that since God is the reality determining human existence, the reality of God cannot be grasped as simply some universal truth or platitude. God also involves a claim, a demand, and a challenge. Edwards postulates that this characteristic qualifies as a genuine mark of Christian spirituality as it manifests in individuals remaining open to God so that God and the gospel have real sway, import, and strength over their interior and outward lives. Edwards notes that the person who really encounters God, in the manifest way God reveals the divine nature, is so persuaded of the reality of God that he or she experiments with ways of being-in-the-world previously not undertaken that make one's life cohere more meaningfully to the activity of the divine incursion. There not only ought to be remarkable alteration, there should be continual investigation of oneself and verifiable evidence of the reality of this creative change and transformation.

The next mark of genuine spirituality according to Edwards is evangelical humility. Edwards believed that essentially, before one really encountered God in the divine attributes, there was a strong tendency in the human self toward self-inflation and self-aggrandizement.

Self-creation and self-righteousness are the condition of original sin and highlight presumptuous attempts to construct one's own identity rather than to receive identity from God. As one appropriates the divine image one does not become God. Indeed, one becomes more like God, but the focus never really is on the self and its accomplishments,

²⁵ Rudolf Bultmann, "What Does it Mean To Speak of God?" in *Faith and Understanding*, trans. Louise Smith (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1969), 53-66.

at least in terms of what God's activity in us is all about. Instead, the focus is squarely on the relationality to others and the triune God and on the role that the Trinity plays in this mysterious appropriation of the divine imago.

Bultmann postulates that we never really establish the genuine self by adopting some worldview as though God did not exist or as though we did not exist within the sphere of God's existence. Rather, we must, as persons of evangelical humility and faith, continually act toward God in accord with God as this God speaks to us and acts on us, determining our existence and the continuation of our existence in the divine field of grace.²⁶

The seventh feature of Jonathan Edwards' schema for pastoral diagnosis points to a transformative "change in one's nature."²⁷ He maintains that this change is fundamental. The life of one who has changed in this fundamental way, Edwards argues, seeks to integrate the sweep of human life into an enduring theological project that embodies holy love. Genuine spirituality is transforming and reconstructs both the "sensibility, exercise, and frame of the soul."

The eighth and ninth articles of Edwards model are comparable and will be dealt with together. Both point to distinctive dispositional or mood-tone-like features that are a major factor in the construction of Christian character or personhood. Edwards asserts that a true humanity was seen in the humanity of Christ and that this humanity took shape in an actual, realized concretion, to the exclusion of other concretions, and that this

²⁶ Ibid., 64-5.

²⁷ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 266ff.

concretion of Jesus takes form clustered about virtues that are fundamentally realized in the beatitudes.²⁸ The process of becoming human anticipates the process of the church becoming, as Sobrino asserts, the church of the beatitudes and the individuals who make up the church characterized by the features expressed there.²⁹

These virtues and dispositions include qualities embodied in the beatitudes and indicate a strong sense of self, one that is rooted firmly in God. He writes that, as a rule, “when persons are fierce and violent and exert their sharp and bitter passions, it shows weakness instead of strength.”³⁰ When the self is rooted as a self in the divine, this tends to produce in the self a center of stability and strength which eventuates in what can only be described as characteristics typically associated with holiness, such as mercy, integrity, and forgiveness, all of which indicate amenability, a requirement for life in church and human community typified by flexibility, tolerance, receptivity, tenderness, respect, kindness, and civility. That is to say, the self rooted in relation to God exhibits a self-strength, self-control, and self-direction that allows and encourages them in both their free self-individuality and self-distinction.³¹

Edwards’ eighth and ninth features can be understood as well-nuanced forms of the trait of amenability as embodied in the beatitudes. Ulrich Luz notes that, historically,

²⁸ Ibid., 272.

²⁹ Jon Sobrino, *The Principle of Mercy* (Maryknoll, N. Y.: Orbis, 1994), 11; *Jesus in Latin America*, 27.

³⁰ Edwards, *Religious Affections*, 279.

³¹ Welker, *God the Spirit*, 279 ff.

the beatitudes have been understood as the impartation of grace, ethical admonition, and an order of life for the community. Thus, they are interpreted as ethics, manifestation of the divine being, and appropriation of that being. In this sense, the beatitudes are assuredly to be internalized, but also, they are both a challenge and a demand, and each nuance in the beatitudes and the subtleties of interpretation, are ultimately to be appreciated all as gracious manifestations of the divine incursion into the world of created humans and their praxis.³²

The concluding features of Edwards' scheme remind us that these virtues ought to be received in proportion to the other distinct virtues, and invariably in the context of continuing the seeking for self-transcendence by appropriating novel and expanding horizons. The task of soul-making through the soul-appropriating of the divine image is the primary destiny for the Christian. If spirituality is authentic, Edwards posits there will be proportion and continual longing for the satisfaction of a more thorough appropriation of the affections. Finally, Edwards postulates that this appropriation will be comprehended as the quintessential challenge and opportunity of life.

John Wesley: The Grace of Perfection and Warm Love

John Wesley also labored with the issue of trying to establish a heuristic guideline for appraising what he believed were the authentic, broad-brushstrokes concerning criteria for judging religious experience and spirituality. Many of his writings deal directly with the problem of trying to discern the genuine effects of the divine upon the human subject and trying to name those specific phenomenon. He does in this three of his most important and

³² Ulrich Luz, *Matthew 1-7: A Continental Commentary*, trans. Wilhelm C. Linss (Minneapolis: Fortress, 1989), 229ff.

popular works, particularly among Methodist clergy, which include *A Plain Account of Christian Perfection*, *A Scheme of Self-Examination*, and *A Plain Account of Genuine Christianity*. Wesleyan scholar Albert Outler notes that, while Wesley was neither a mystic nor a peaker, and more prone to a rational, scriptural Christianity, his most involved and enduring concern was the business of this project, trying to find a way to discern and talk about the effects and outcome of the Spirit upon the human self. In fact, Outler posits that Wesley's spirituality, which we understand as the entire context in which he united both his doctrine and practice, discloses his emphasis on perfection as his most unique and distinguishing accent and his single most meaningful intonation as the genuine mark of Christianity.³³ Wesleyan scholar Frank Whaling suggests that John Wesley refined his spirituality from the dual foundations of the pragmatic, pastoral routine of spiritual direction and in light of the scientific and deist critiques of religion that were just coming into life as the scientific, technological, and industrial revolutions were gaining ground. Interestingly enough, these are two of the prominent foundations upon which this project is being constructed.³⁴

Wesley did not argue against the ability of science to stake its claim in the modern world or its claim to elucidate the workings of the world or the human mind based upon novel models of science. But Christianity had not become all of a sudden obsolete, as many of science's adherents claimed. For Wesley, the authentic Christian life and the

³³ Frank Whaling ed., *John and Charles Wesley*. (New York: Paulist, 1981), xv.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, 68-70.

appropriation and manifestation of Christian character in and of itself was the most significant and genuine outcome designating the work of the divine. Scientific method could only corroborate Christianity's claim if this was true. Wesley's writing on the subject has all the benefits of a model that can be empirically tested. The characteristics which he affirms in his program embody perfection, are observable and empirically verifiable, and have strong attestation throughout the Christian tradition for what he claimed them to be, that is, authentic guideposts of the human appropriation of the divine.³⁵

The first of John Wesley's qualities in his heuristic guide for what he considers the authentic signifiers of Christian character, are the qualities of humility, modesty, and wonder created in the human before the mystery and immensity of God. The contrast between the experienced, immense creative enterprise of God and the human person's own modest estate and abilities creates strong feelings of unpretentiousness.

Subsequent, is a continual sense of dependence upon God for natural and moral endowments and a strong sense of gratitude to the sheer graciousness of life. This creature feeling of dependence is nuanced by a feeling of the sacredness of life and reverence toward God.

The third feature of Wesley's program is the commitment to transform the self by the imitation of the divine features, especially justice, mercy, and truth. The fourth authentic feature is a universal love. This is a love that transcends sect, party, blood, family, convenience, acquaintance, denomination, and any other secondary social factors. Wesley

³⁵ Ibid., 121-33.

posits that authentic Christianity is marked by the divine love, which loves everyone sweepingly and is deeply committed to the good of all.

The next feature in this design is a disinterested love that is generous and somewhat liberated from self-advantage and self-aggrandizement. The characteristics of authentic, universal, disinterested love are gentleness, tenderness, sweetness, humanity, courtesy, affability, calmness, and modesty, and are amply devoid of suspicion, and jealousy.

The succeeding feature in Wesley's heuristic is a strict regard for truth. This involves speaking without guile and speaking simply and sincerely, refraining from speaking contrary to love and justice, and refraining from unloving words.

The eight feature of authenticity is right, just, and merciful actions. It means responsibility to family and community and involves the abolition of any type of willful harm or violence to others.

A ninth characteristic is an aversion to the vulgar and a captivation for moral luster and beauty. There is also exhibited a certain amount of self-stability and strength characterized by lack of fear of criticism, rejection, want, or death.

Finally, there exists a contentment coming from the belief that one is a creature of a loving God and not a product of blind chance or inexorable necessity. There is the strong conviction that God loves the individual, is working for the individual's good, will be present with the individual through all things, and will finally preserve the individual in eternity.

For spiritual directive pastoral assessment, the pastor might use any of these programs alone or in ~~combination with the others and in combination with other biblical materials~~ and themes examined earlier in the dissertation. The exploration of qualities such as

these can lead to fertile and meaningful dialogue, and prompt significant growth and self-awareness in the laity. At last, such searching ought to lead to a greater enjoyment and understanding of the nature of God and of a possible theological understanding of the human personality in its dynamic reaching toward its most authentic evolution, identity, and destiny in the triune God.

We now want to proceed by suggesting some practical applications which might help understand the way in which these programs might be used in various setting of parish life.

CHAPTER 10

Suggestions for Pastoral Practice

The Pastor as Theological Edge Interpreter

For a minister working in a local parish setting, one of many church responsibilities for practicing ministry is the moment of engaging the laity in the context of a theology of pastoral care and counseling. Clergy practice caring and counseling in every situation in which they find themselves with the laity. Because of the specific nature of their calling, clergy primarily operate toward their parishioners with some theological image of people.

Because pastors are professional theologians, the language pastors collaboratively use with the laity is theological language, that addresses human questions and solutions through the specific language of theology and ecclesiology. Pastors specialize in making theological evaluations. Evaluation means making judgments, appraisals, and examinations. Pastors are called and trained to make discriminating theological evaluations and assessments. This means they operate primarily from a theological framework of mutual interpretation with the laity to focus the laity in the local church setting.

As Christian leaders, clergy are called to empower the local church to discover and appropriate theological answers for the problems which confront the persons within the parish. The sacred covenant between the laity and the ordained clergy means that the clergy will provide specific, Christian theological perspectives and answers to the personal and social dilemmas which confront the laity in the nexus of life. The pastor supplies a Christian hermeneutic to all tasks which engage her. The local church possesses a Christian identity, and it covenants to engage a minister who can assist in the

clarification, interpretation, and evolution of that identity.

Lay persons desire a Christian theological perspective to be provided for them by the pastor in order that they can strive toward authenticity with their identity and destiny and, in their engagement with the world and God. Further, they desire to live life fully, happily and finally, solve any problem which arises in their lives with the aid of some sophisticated theological input. The pastor has covenanted through ordination to do this with them.

Pastors as the primary theological interpreters and enablers in the life of the laity covenant to aid in the theological examinations that the laity require. Pastors serve the laity in many ways in the effort to help them understand their identity and destiny in God. There are many different models from which a pastor can operate as the primary theological interpreter for a local congregation. In our first chapter, we mentioned several of them. In the remainder of the dissertation we offered our model for our theological interpretation of the privilege and responsibility of pastoral care and counseling.

Pastors are at an advantage when they can operate for the laity from more than one model of theological interpretation. Theological competence in several models is preferable to competence in only one model. This is because lay persons are not a monoculture but reflect the pluralism of the current milieu. If the pastor operates from only one theological model, he or she will be limited in the interpretive and guiding work that must be done. Pastors are also at an advantage when they can operate, for the laity, in a multidisciplinary, hermeneutical framework. Theology in the parish needs to be correlated with other disciplines, such as the psychological sciences, management, administration, finance, political, and economic theory. According to Pruyser in *The*

Minister as Diagnostician, a pastor who can become proficient in several of these disciplines, will be able to provide and inspire a superior quality of ministry (107).

Because lay persons come to pastors not, primarily, as problem solvers, but as theological interpreters of human identity, human destiny, and the manner in which God involves the divine being in the world, the pastor needs to have a convincing and sophisticated understanding of these matters. The pastor needs a theological framework that can bring theological meaning to the diverse people and situations she is called to interpret. In addition, there ought to be some fundamental principle driving the basic theological hermeneutic of the pastor, one that has reliable attestation in scripture, tradition, and human experience, and one in which the laity can reasonably understand themselves and God. We posit that such a principle is the human commitment to the process of self-transcendence or creative transformation, where appropriation of the qualities of Christian character are sought and received from intimacy with God as both human identity and human destiny.

Christianity is an interpretation of reality. It is not the only available interpretation of reality. However, it is the prevailing interpretation of reality in the church. As an integrative, interpretive, theological framework, it is there to provide meaning, direction, and unification to all church functions. When the pastor fails continuously to interpret the theological meaning of the church and all its functions, then often the finest theological interpretation is lost, or the laity conjure up their own private non-theological meanings, or worse, the church forgets who it is, in which case both theological identity and destiny become lost, and conscious self-transcendence slips away. We posit that every church function ought to be understood as an opportunity for the pastor to care, and we

speculate that the single, synoptic principle of self-transcendence, as we have explicated it throughout this dissertation, can provide both an interpretive and integrative function.

We theorize that pastoral care is provision of a theological framework for the church on all occasions. Pastoral caring indicates that the pastor cares enough to give the parish an adequate grasp of the theological nature and destiny of human identity of which she is capable. Of course, pastoral caring is most dramatic during the edge moments, but the caring done at those moments ought to reinforce the self-transcending themes that the laity hear from the pastor during funerals, Sunday school, worship, and bake sales.

We will now look at some case studies and indicate how caring as integrative, interpretive, theological intervention might work.

Case Study 1. Martha: Self-Transcending Lover of the Poor

Martha came to my office as a late middle-aged woman caught in a meager marriage to a man for whom she had lost esteem long ago and by whom she was evidently bored. She had been brought up to believe divorce was wrong, and it was not an option for her at this time. She was high-school-educated and had three grown children, all of whom were currently in college. She had held several clerical jobs over the years, whenever she was free from child-rearing. Her work record was good. She was reliable and responsible.

She was always involved with church, has an amazing voice, sings in the church choir, and with two of her sisters, travels around the county doing special music for church services and weddings. She was extroverted, loved people, and was quite charismatic. Her hidden desire was to be a missionary to the persecuted Native

American tribes in Guatemala. She came from a devout, evangelical family and characterized herself as rather conventional in her late teens, before she got married during the war years in the mid-forties.

Her unfulfillment in her marital life was compensated for by a deep investment in the classic movie, romantic comedies and dramas of what she called “Hollywood’s golden years,” which, she informed me, were the forties and early fifties. She talked about Cary Grant, Elizabeth Taylor, Kathryn Hepburn, and Clark Gable with passion and excitement. She talked about them as though they might still be big or current box office. She had never been seriously ill, was currently on no medication, and said she felt good. The only problem was that now and then she “got the blues pretty bad” and “went on a crying jag for a few days now and then.”

She was particularly close to her sisters and talked about them to an extent that was unusual for someone her age. She said that because of her unfulfilling marriage and since her sister’s marriages also needed relational supplement, they relied on each other and were best friends. Essentially, she had come to me for what I can only call a life assessment. Life, she told me, came with “no instructions,” and she was unsure about how she was doing and whether I could help her out. Her husband and friends gave her little significant mirroring or feed-back and sometimes she said she wasn’t exactly sure who she was, or where she was heading.

I asked her how she thought she was doing and she told me. She talked about how she typically spent her days and concluded that she was “pretty good, I mean, I think I am a pretty good Christian, at least that is what plenty of others tell me.” But she also said she was not exactly certain what they meant by that, and that conversations skip around from

one thing to the next so quickly, that she never got much more than that, and so she really did not know and longed to hear more.

She wanted to know if there was any way of better understanding herself spiritually, and understanding the way in which God was working in her life. She had heard me mention, in several sermons, about growing to be more like Christ, spiritual evaluation, and showing in one's life evidence that one belonged to God. She wanted to come to a better understanding of what these ideas meant. Some of her friends encouraged her to begin to plunge more deeply into a form of personal spirituality which was more growth-oriented and suited for her specific needs. She regularly watches Mother Angelica, the Marian religious who founded EWTN on television, and has heard her advocate occasionally having "a spiritual checkup with a priest just like you have a physical checkup with your doctor." This is what she decided to do. It is my belief that I had set this thing up through my own attendance to the subject and some serious advertising in the monthly newsletter about it. I had also done a special six week Lenten study on the subject of Christian self-examination, since that is a notable theme of Lent. For that study, I used some of the material that the early Methodist societies used for the same purpose. Martha was present for all of the sessions that Lent. Her desire was to become more conscious and intentional about her spirituality

The way we began was that I gave her the data of the three programs of Christian epistemic practices and explained to her what they were and the manner in which they could be used. Together, we decided to use the Wesleyan program as a catalyst for pastoral counseling. It took us four sessions to cover the features that Wesley outlined.

We spent almost an entire session on the concept and meanings of universal love, since Martha had always felt as connected to others as she had to her own family. She had never neglected her family, but often thought it was odd that she felt such love for others, including strangers and non-Christians. In fact, she had been seriously criticized for this by her husband and thought maybe something was wrong with her. The bottom line seemed to be that her husband was trying to cut her off from the kind of love to which Christ was calling her to, including a love for the poor, which she never really found a way to express. We also looked at her secret desire to become a missionary to Guatemala. I could only confirm this as God urging her toward a more *partial* love, as Sobrino called it, or a universal, social love as Wesley called. We managed to connect her up as an assistant in the local United Methodist soup kitchen two days a week. We also spent some time on the idea of beauty. She loved art and felt that art generally was very spiritual. One of her favorite practices was to trace masterpiece religious paintings and then water color them in as a form of prayer. She also wondered why Protestant churches seemed so unfriendly toward art, which, in her way of thinking, made Catholic churches so beautiful and more pleasant.

We conjectured about the various manner in which these Wesleyan qualities might or might not be present in her, and whether she thought God was indeed in the process of giving these to her. She said that it was her belief that this fact was fairly well established! She always had liked the idea that God was giving her these kinds of spiritual gifts and said her favorite hymn was the spiritual, *Lord, I Want To Be A Christian*. She understood that these qualities were what she was requesting from God as she thought through and prayed the song, often in the silence of her own heart. Her father was fond of Saint Paul.

She, too, like her father, strongly embraced the mystical christology of Paul's theology of gifts and fruits. The thrust of the counseling was the discussion around the theological virtues and discussion of Christian character, specifically the way that God grants the virtues to us and our responsibility for their maintenance and expression.

The Negative Edge

Pastors are called to offer theological interpretation of illness and death regularly.

Persons in the parish will more readily respond to discussion if the pastor prepares the church, by enabling theological interpretation as a regular part of church life. Funerals are one of the best moments to reflect upon the meanings of illness and death, both individually, with grieving family, and corporately, as the church gathers for the funeral service. The themes of God's presence at the time of death and illness, and the meaning of the death for the survivors, ought to be proclaimed in liturgy and sermon, addressed during pastoral caring sessions when the pastor is alone with hospital or hospice patients, or and developed further during the many follow-up calls to assist with adjustment.

Adjustment here does not mean simply getting comfortable with the loss. Rather, it means as well embracing God and others more lovingly. It is important for the pastor to enable the persons needing care to dialogue if they feel the need. But in case they are silent, then the pastor ought to offer some words of theological comfort and direction that weave the meaning of loss and suffering into the larger tapestry of what God is doing and the manner in which God works. A common practice is to offer theological interpretation and ask God for understanding at the time of prayer during these contacts. Often a prayer such as this will open up the parishioner to become involved in dialogue.

Case Study 2. Naomi: Alone and Self-Transcending on Her Own

Naomi is an elderly woman, retired and recently widowed who, for the first time in her life, found herself alone. She had been married for fifty-two years, has two middle-aged children and worked full-time her entire life. She never had been alone before this and came to see me to get her bearings while she adjusted. We had six sessions together along with many telephone conversations, as well as snatches of sessions here and there during the course of normal church life.

Primarily, we worked on her grief, but we did this in the context of struggling to create a new spirituality for her, one that, as she put it, “did not go through my husband to God, but went straight from me to God.” She was insecure and worried but, at the same time, excited about what this might mean for her. The bottom line for her was that, using Wesley’s program for spirituality, we began the process of forging for her what I would call a more authentic spirituality, one much more sensitive to her gifts, interests, and individuality. In the course of each session, she would blurt out several times, with the same sense of astonished discovery, “I relied on James [her husband] way too much.”

We discovered that she possessed a much deeper spirituality than she had ever imagined. Her adjustment to singleness, although difficult early on, has been by her own report good. I agree, from what I see of her, since she is quite involved in the life of the church. She often wonders about other elderly women who might not know how available God is and what a comfort God is. She found strength within her that she did not know she had and now is rather glad to have a few years to herself, alone with God in the silence of her small apartment. Like Martha, Naomi too wants to begin practicing a more universal love and does so twice a week by leading a Bible Study for elderly widows and

a few widowers in her apartment building. She reports back to me that they are discovering that even at their age there is much to learn and edges that need expansion.

Case Study 3. Christianne: Self-Transcending Feminist

One of the more educated and motivated parishioners was a woman name Christianne. Christianne is currently serving as chair for church's Committee on the Status and Role of Women as well as Shalom Zone vice chairperson. The Shalom Zone Initiative is a United Methodist urban ministry, established across the country, to address urban issues such as racism, poverty, family and children's issues, and unemployment in the cities, in the wake of the race riots induced by the first verdict in the beating of Rodney King.

Christianne is a growth-oriented individual, whose favorite gurus include Dorothy Day and Dorothy Solle, "my two Dorothys," as she calls them. In trying to work with her for a more authentic faith, the discernment program of Jon Sobrino has been more helpful than the other two programs. In fact, she likes the other two but has told me that she thinks they are "too conservative" and do not seem to appreciate or stress the need for peace and justice social ministries and women's concerns, to which she is wholeheartedly dedicated.

She leads the entire church in these issues and is not a little frustrated at some of the members' "totally privatized faith," as she calls it. I tend to tell her that the people are supportive of her, which is true, but too frightened to get involved in what they consider controversial political issues. Of course, she cannot comprehend this and interprets their reactions as uncaring, which sometimes does appear to be the case.

Nevertheless, the discernment program of Sobrino has been most helpful in enabling

her to realize that she is on the right track, and that she has been given rare but wonderful gifts, including, lioness-hearted courage, and she ought to continue to develop and express them. The idea that her love for the marginalized gets her into trouble with those in the community and local church who do not want the economic or political status quo challenged at any level, and that love is therefore, often, as Sobrino posits, conflictual, enables her to realize that she is not some “crazy trouble maker” but rather someone who really has a heart for the city, its people, and its problems. One of her favorite sayings is, “since when did fairness become so controversial?” Her efforts have served as a catalyst for a few others to join with her in her particular ministries.

She feels strongly about gay and lesbian rights, and regularly locks horns during church council meetings with a person who presents as rather homophobic. I tell her that this is beneficial for the parish and work with her to enable her to justify a solid case for her beliefs and their expression using Sobrino’s theological rationale. Because she often feels like she is throwing a hornet’s nest into things, it is helpful for her to possess the other two discernment programs. Although they might seem inordinately introspective, they are necessary for someone like Chris, because the journey inward is as important as the journey outward. All three of them serve as a good reality check for spiritual authenticity. Chris has become aware that she possesses enough of the inward spiritual gifts and graces, through looking closely at the qualities of Christian character described in the discernment programs of both Jonathan Edwards and John Wesley, to understand that when she does have a scrape with someone or a disagreement about these social issues, she can be relatively certain it is not some personal or interpersonal fault, but more of a political matter, which, from my perspective, invariably seems to be

case. The pastor needs to be tuned in to the laity in order to enable them to continue expressing and developing their gifts and graces.

Many in the parish who prefer Edward's program and the kind of spirituality expressed there, also need the kind of challenges expressed in Sobrino's discernment program, and some of the features in Wesley's program, particular Wesley's idea of universal and social love. The fact that Edwards was a missionary to the Native Americans and Wesley a pastor to Welsh tin miners helps us understand that all these schemes contain and involve both the personal and political. The personal is political.

Self-Transcending Sermons, Theological Studies, Meetings, and Bake Sales

We have stated that local church theological interpretation is the primary goal of pastoral theology and pastoral care, and that pastoral caring is the major theme informing all pastoral work. This means that the theme of self-transcendence as we have explicated it, can serve as one possible integrating motif for all pastoral work. Without a single, synoptic motif integrating pastoral care as it occurs in sermon, study, liturgy and administration, pastoral work can become fragmented. The various models of pastoral care indicate that some unifying theme or interpretation of the theological project ought to integrate ministry in a manner that possesses intricacy, productivity, and is sensitive to the pluralism within the parish. We believe that self-transcendence is a reasonable way for persons to think about what is most authentic in religious life. Further, we believe that this theme ought to be intentionally communicated in and through all activities within the church, particularly the ones over which the pastor presides. Self-transcendence or expansion of edges can be the theme underlying all sermons, studies, and worship, one

that makes church theology and practice understandable and weaves everything which happens in the church into a richly nuanced, yet unified, tapestry.

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